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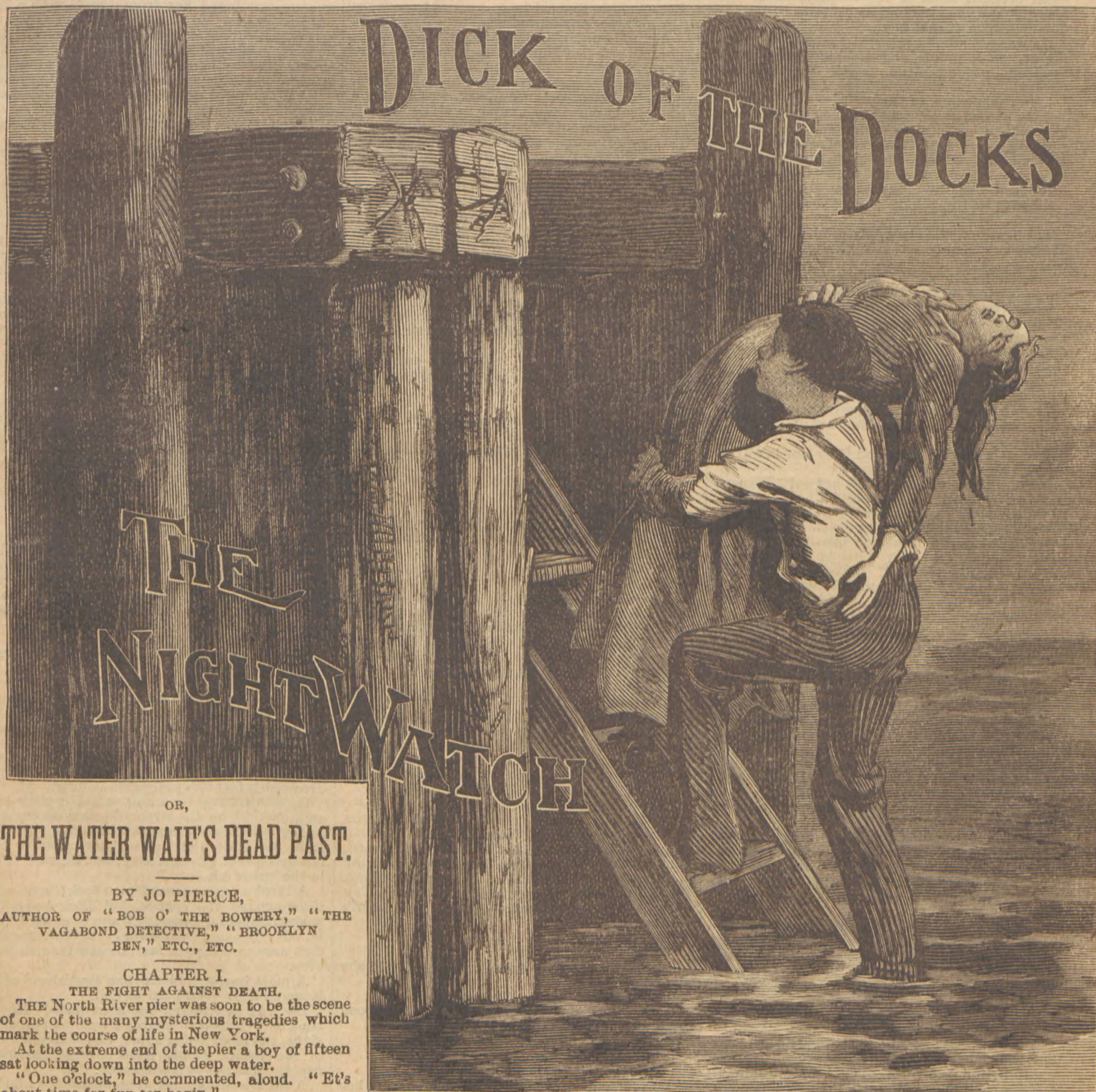
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OR, THE WATER WAIF'S DEAD PAST.

BY JO PIERCE,
AUTHOR OF "BOB O' THE BOWERY," "THE
VAGABOND DETECTIVE," "BROOKLYN
BEN," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIGHT AGAINST DEATH.

THE North River pier was soon to be the scene of one of the many mysterious tragedies which mark the course of life in New York.

At the extreme end of the pier a boy of fifteen sat looking down into the deep water.

"One o'clock," he commented, aloud. "Et's about time fer fun ter begin."

Even as he spoke a covered carriage came along the street and paused at the pier. The

TO LIFT HIS BURDEN FROM THE RIVER AND BEAR HER UP THE SLIMY STEPS WAS A SEVERE STRUGGLE AND STRAIN FOR THE BRAVE NIGHT-WATCHER.

boy saw it, and kept his gaze upon that quarter. His remark had been merely a general one, and he had no reason to expect that carriage or any other, but he was interested.

In point of fact he was interested in all things of the night, and a practice of observing what occurred after darkness closed over great Gotham had gained for him the sobriquet of "Night-Watch Dick."

Several persons alighted from the vehicle. He had not expected that the matter would furnish anything of moment to him, but he suddenly grew more attentive. There was a delay by the carriage, as if some one was rebelling against the plan of leaving it.

"A gal, b'jinks!" commented the Night-Watcher, as the delay was broken by the appearance of another person. "So she is the one who didn't want ter git out? I don't blame her a bit. This here locality ain't pretty ter any eyes at night, an' no fly female would fall in love with it. Wonder w'ot is up? Hello! they're comin' this way!"

The party advanced a few steps along the pier.

By this time Dick could see there were three men and two women. He could not imagine what brought them to the locality, for it was one which seemed without attractions to the ordinary person at that hour.

He was not wholly satisfied that he was looking at honest people, and suddenly but quickly assumed a prone position, to guard against discovery.

Light soon came, in part.

They paused at the south side of the pier and gave indications of descending, and for the first time Dick perceived that a row-boat was there. He could not reconcile himself to the belief that any ordinary object should make such a party leave New York by night in such a way.

"Kin it be they're all toughs?" he murmured. "Or—"

The pause expressed a good deal, for the Night-Watcher remembered the hesitation by the carriage.

"Still," he added, "I ain't seen nothin', yet, ter justify me in interferin'. Mebbe all's well."

There was no further hitch about the case. The unknown men worked with celerity, and the whole party were soon in the boat. Then one of the men took the oars, and the craft was pushed away from the pier.

The water was by no means smooth, and as it fully caught the boat in its grasp the latter was tossed about roughly. This circumstance seemed to rouse sudden fear on the part of one of the females.

She leaped to her feet, and Dick saw her arms thrown up toward the heavens.

"No, no!" she cried, "I will not go! Take me back or I will scream for help!"

"You idiot!" growled a man in reply, "hush your noise, or I'll knock you overboard!"

"Heaven knows what you intend to do, anyway; I don't. Oh! why did I consent to come here; I will go no further. Take me back, or I'll cry for help—I will scream, 'Murder!'"

One of the men sprung up and grasped her arm roughly.

"Silence!" he ordered, harshly.

"Then take me back—"

"We will not!"

"Then I will summon help. Great heavens! I fear for my life! Help! he—"

The last word was half-smothered as his hand fell upon her throat, but it was easier to stop the outcry than to prevent her from struggling. She did struggle with desperation, and Night-Watch Dick remained inactive no longer. He had sprung to his feet, and now he ran toward the scene of the struggle, crying out as he went:

"Let up on that, you gallus critters! Stop it, or—"

The threat remained unspoken. The boat gave a sudden lurch and went over, throwing the whole party into the water. One moment they were visible to Dick as they went over in confusion; the next he could see nothing but the blackness of night.

But the sound of legs and arms splashing the water was audible enough, and Dick was alert to meet the emergency. He was a strong and skillful swimmer, and it was far from being his nature to remain idle when women were in danger.

He cast off his shoes and coat, and leaped into the water.

A few strokes took him to the overturned boat, but, somewhat to his surprise, no one was clinging to it, and no one was to be seen near at hand!

He struck out to find the imperiled persons, but they had disappeared wholly, it seemed. Not a little puzzled he came to a stop, but at that

moment something occurred so suddenly as to startle him.

By his side there rose a human form. The arms beat the water feebly, and a sound passed the lips which could not be mistaken. The person was in the last stages of drowning—probably, had risen for the last time in life.

Quickly Dick acted. He seized the dimly-seen form, and, finding his grasp was upon a woman, was spurred on to use his strongest endeavors. He raised her head well above the water and began to swim lustily, and as he held a passive burden there was no impediment to his freedom of movement.

He knew how to do the rest, and made his way without delay to the head of the pier, where, on the south inside corner, narrow plank steps led to the pier floor above. To lift his burden from the river and bear her up the slimy steps was a severe struggle and strain for the brave Night-Watcher, but he succeeded at last, and the rescued person was soon laid on the plank floor.

"Et's the gal!" Dick decided.

He took a step toward the front, thinking of the older woman, but paused. There had been no outcry. Before that time she had either saved herself, been saved by others, or was drowned. It was useless to think of her.

Returning to the girl he was about to seek the street for a policeman and have heroic measures resorted to in order to revive her, but a brief examination satisfied him that such measures were not necessary.

Narrow as her escape from drowning had been, her unconsciousness, he decided, was a swoon from fright, pure and simple, and he did not doubt that she would soon recover.

He was not a little interested in the case, for he knew the party that had gone to the boat was not one with friendly feelings and confidence. The objection of the girl to leave the carriage, and the fight of the woman after entering the boat—a fight made too late—spoke strongly.

"Et's another gallus job," soliloquized Dick. "Sech things are always goin' on, an' decent people wouldn't hev no show ef it wa'n't fer me an' the perleecemen. Now, as I figger et up, them men was takin' the females away fer an evil objick. W'ot is the racket?"

There was no one at hand to explain, and his own speculations were cut short by a sigh from the person he had rescued.

He quickly knelt and raised her head, and after a few minutes she opened her eyes, looked around and made a move toward regaining her feet.

"Don't be scared; you're all right," heartily assured the rescuer.

"But—but how did I get so wet?" she asked, in surprise.

"Oh! you fell in the water, you remember."

"I don't remember!"

"You don't?"

"No. Why am I here, at this hour of night?"

"Why, you come with two men and the other woman, you know."

"I did?"

"Yes."

They were now standing face to face, and she first looked at him intently, and then put her hand to her head in a bewildered way.

"I remember nothing about this. But, even if it was so, how did I get wet, like this?"

"Say, don't you remember nothing?"

"No."

"Wal, by gum!"

By this brief exclamation Dick expressed the fact that he was very much astonished, and he gazed at the girl in that frame of mind. He could not conceive how any one could forget such an experience, but her manner shut off all chance of doubting her sincerity.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"Wal, I'm Richard Henry Brazer, but you kin know me as Night-Watch Dick. I'm not a night-watchman in the reg'lar sense o' the word, but I sort o' perambulate around after dark an' see that no villainy ain't done in New York. I'm an honest fellow-citizen, and know ev'ry patrolman along the water-front. Now, w'ot's your name?"

"My name?"

"Yes."

"It is—it— Why, I can't think of it!" she exclaimed.

"Gosh hoss-flies! you don't say so!"

"It is very strange, but my name has gone from me. I can't think of it."

"Where do you live?"

"I don't know."

"Where do yer friends live?"

She did not answer at once, but clasped her hands to her head and stood motionless. Suddenly she started and uttered a cry of alarm.

"What does it mean?" she demanded. "Why has all this gone from me? What horrible thing has overtaken me that my memory is a blank?"

Dick knew what it was. He realized, at last, that the horror of those few moments when she was struggling in the water had done the mischief, but he had not had experience enough in life to know how many other people had lost their memory, temporarily or permanently, from causes more or less like this.

Witnessing a case wholly new to him, he gazed at the young woman in a species of awe.

"How am I to go home when I don't know where it is?" she added tremulously.

"By jinks! you needn't worry about a home," Dick declared. "I've got a place sech ez it is, where I hold forth, an' you're jest ez welcome to it ez a toad ter flies. Yes, sirree!"

She uttered a sob but said nothing.

"Come," he added. "Jest you go with me an' I'll see you among honist folks, an' then I'll come back an' look more fer signs. Ketch on!"

CHAPTER II.

THE STREET ROBBERS.

THE girl passively acquiesced in Dick's plan, and he conducted her from the pier to a not distant street. He paused in front of a respectable looking apartment-house, opened the door by means of a key, and led the way upstairs. There he gave her in charge of his friends, and hastened back to the starting point.

He first hunted up the patrolman on the beat and told his story.

"Well, you're a corker!" the officer declared.

"Why so?"

"You find more crookedness than any three officers along the river."

"That's my business," Dick returned, calmly.

"I tol' you perleecemen a year ago that ef you would give me free play along your beats, an' stand by me, I'd manage ter see things that you wouldn't see; 'cause the crooks is always on the watch fer yer brass buttons, but nobody thinks o' suspectin' a ragged, meek-lookin' kid like me."

"You done all you promised, and can smell out mischief in a surprising way. But, now, let's take a look at the pier. Do you think the others were drowned?"

"The men wa'n'; you kin bet high on that; but the woman I am fearful about."

"You probably are right."

They went to the pier, and found the boat bumping against the piles, there, wrong side up. It was finally righted, and then they entered and made a search as thorough as possible. They found absolutely nothing bearing upon the case, and were finally compelled to give it up.

"This must be reported," remarked the patrolman, "and I'll tell the roundsman as soon as he shows up."

"Hev it kep' quiet," Dick urged. "The gal ain't in fit shape ter tell the facts, an' we'll hev ter go slow and light; while ef the newspapers git the story our name is Dennis. Them papers notify crooks of ev'ry move the perleece make, generally, an' it's a wonder any rascals ever is ketched. Now, keep this mum, an' give the perleece a show."

The officer agreed to do what he could, and Dick left him.

The boy was a good deal interested in his new case. The young woman would have been an object of interest, anyhow, with her past life lost so strangely, while the chances of a drama of crime in the past made her doubly so.

He was thinking of all this as he made his way homeward, but his thoughts were abruptly diverted before the journey was over.

He was aroused by a half-stifled cry for help, and, looking up the street, he saw on the next corner several men engaged in a struggle. The scene was one which had an attraction for him, not because of idle curiosity, but because it was in the line of his duty.

A lurch of the mass of men took them out of sight around the corner, but Dick knew they would not get far away, so tramped along leisurely, but when he rounded the corner no struggling men were visible;—in fact, he saw no men whatever.

A more peaceful block than that ahead of him it would have been hard to find.

He was bewildered for a moment. Enough time had elapsed to enable a man to run out of sight, the block being short, but that the victim of the assault should have covered ground so rapidly was not to be expected.

A faint moan almost at his feet made him leap backward, but it gave him a clew to the mystery.

There lay a man, close to the building, and it

became clear that he had been felled by the others, who had then run away.

Quickly he bent over the unknown.

He saw a well dressed person with thick gray hair. The latter was lying face downward, and gave no evidence that he was conscious of the condition of affairs, or of Dick's presence.

"Hullo! wot's the riddle?" the Night-Watcher inquired.

There was no reply.

"Be you hurt?" the speaker continued.

"Go away!" was the faint response, followed by a groan. "You have killed me; now be decent enough to let me breathe my last in peace."

"Hold on a fraction, boss! I ain't the man that slewed you. Them gallus chaps hev let out a link an' skipped, an' I'm a good Samaritum. See? Be you stabbed, or shot dead?"

The unknown turned his head slightly.

"You are a boy."

"I be, this year."

"It was not you who assaulted me. Have they really left?"

"They hev, fer sure. Who was they? Why did they fall outer you?"

"The villains! the cowards! They were three to one, and I an old man."

"Ef you've got a wound that is bleeding, it needs ter be seen to, mister."

"Give me your hand."

Dick obeyed, and the old man turned and slowly rose to a sitting position. He then put his hand to his head.

"The hurt is here," he explained. "They struck me repeatedly with some blunt weapon; possibly, with a slung-shot."

"They was after yer money, wa'n't they?"

The old man felt in his pocket and drew out a small roll of money, which he counted.

"They have not taken anything from me, and I am left in doubt as to the motive of their assault. I don't know that I ever saw one of them before. They may have been influenced simply by motives of malicious mischief, or, possibly," he more thoughtfully added, "they were set upon me by some of my enemies."

Moved, evidently, by a sudden thought he thrust his hand into the breast-pocket of his coat. Then his expression suddenly changed and he felt about hurriedly.

"Gone!" he exclaimed.

"What?"

There was no immediate answer, and he continued to search for some time. Then he gave it up, and his face told that the loss was keenly felt.

"All is now clear," he finally announced. "I have been robbed, and there is no mystery about the assault. Those men did not even look for my money, but seized the paper and ran away. I can surmise who set them upon me."

"Was 'the paper' vallerble?"

"Yes, very valuable."

"Wal, that's hard lines, but ef you know who set them on ter you, you kin tell the perleece right off, an' hev them arrested."

"That's not so easy;" and the old man shook his head.

"Why not?"

"I can't explain, nor can I take any step, at present, to punish them at law. I've got to manage the matter delicately, and," he added, with a pause between each word, "get my property back the best way I can—if I can get it at all."

Up to this time he had been leaning against the building. He now dispensed with this aid.

"My head swims dizzily," he remarked.

"Can I get you to go home with me?"

"Sure, mister! I'm always glad to give a feller-citizen a lift."

"Let me rest my hand on your shoulder, then."

The order of march was begun as planned, and they walked away just in time to escape being interviewed by a slow-moving patrolman, who was treading ponderously toward the spot.

It was somewhat of a walk to their destination, and the old man was not a sociable companion. Dick was anxious to learn more about the affair, but the old fellow's mind was running wholly on his late adventure, showing that the loss of the paper had been a severe shock to him; and he wholly ignored some of the boy's questions.

All the latter learned was that the old man was named Aleck Goodwind.

After awhile they reached and entered a plain, old-fashioned house. Goodwind led the way to the second floor, passed into one of the rooms, and dropped heavily into a chair.

"I am lucky to get here alive," he declared, clasping his head.

"Don't you want a doctor?"

"No. A doctor is a butcher of men; I won't have them fooling around me. I think I shall be all right in the morning. Will you stay with me to-night? I have three rooms here, and you can lie on yonder lounge. Will you stay?"

Dick thought of the young woman he had rescued from the river, and felt that he ought to return to see her, but as she was in good hands, he decided to oblige Goodwind.

He gave his decision accordingly, and then, at his companion's request, aided him to retire. The latter was still in poor condition, but Dick believed he would be all right in the morning.

When he was disposed of, and stowed away in bed in the next room, Dick returned to his own quarters. He looked around critically.

"Good, plain, comfortable outfit," he commented. "Reckon Aleck is a gent o' some financial means—Great Scott! wot's that?"

CHAPTER III.

RICHARD'S OBSCURE MISSION.

DICK'S roving gaze had gone to the wall, which was ornamented with pictures of various kinds, all of which proved of no interest until his observation reached a portrait done in crayon. At this he looked in open-eyed surprise.

"B'jinks! et is the gal I fished out o' the dock!" he declared.

He could not have met with a greater start. He had been thinking of the nameless girl, but not for a moment as one who could be connected with his later experience. Hence, it was a total surprise to see the portrait.

"Yes, sirree, it's her," he added. "Same eyes, nose, mouth an' ginerall make-up. Looks ez much like her as two peas are alike. Gosh all pitchforks! wot is her picture doin' here?"

It was a hard question to answer, and all his efforts only landed him deeper in bewilderment. He was tempted to go in and question Aleck Goodwind at once, but finally decided not to be so precipitate.

He walked around and viewed the portrait from various points. It was of large size, and the subject seemed on the point of speaking, so natural was the likeness.

"Et beats me; don't hardly seem possible. Ef her an' him know each other it is right queer I hev run ag'inst both on 'em the same night. But it must be they do know each an' t'other. But—Wal, et ain't no good ter lose time in speculation."

Despite this decision he could not dismiss the matter from his mind, and even when he had turned off the gas and lain down on the lounge the matter kept him busy until he fell asleep.

It was daylight when he awoke, and as he heard Goodwind stirring in the next room he rose hastily and prepared to meet him.

It was not long before the host made his appearance. He was pale, but Dick decided from his appearance that he was not suffering from his adventure to any great extent.

"So you are astir," Goodwind began. "I looked in awhile ago, but you were sleeping so peacefully that I let you rest."

"I'm afraid I've played glutton on the sleepin' racket, but I'm on deck, now. How do you come out, mister?"

"My head is very tender to the touch, and I feel weak and 'broken-up,' but, otherwise, am all right. My mind is clear, and I feel sure I have no fracture of the skull. In fact," the speaker added, assuming a cheerful air, "I feel like doing justice to breakfast, which I have ordered for two. Here it comes, now!"

There was a knock at the hall door, and when Goodwind invited the applicant in, a servant appeared with a well-laden waiter. He set the table and left them alone.

"Fall to, without ceremony," Aleck directed.

His manner was unusually bluff, and Dick was not at a loss to see that the speaker realized the difference in their worldly stations, and wished to put him at ease—though whether his motive was one of unalloyed kindness was another matter.

So the well-dressed old man and the shabbily-clothed boy sat down together. Dick was not in the least embarrassed.

"You've got a fine lay-out here," he observed, calmly.

"I like the good things of life."

"Me, too, but I don't git them often."

"Eat hearty, now."

"I'll try to make my mark."

Richard fully carried out his plan, and showed an appetite which put his host's completely in the shade. When they were done Goodwind lighted a cigar and proceeded to business.

"Last night," he remarked, frankly, "I did that which I should not have done had I been in my usual mental condition; I invited a boy who was a stranger to me to stay here and make himself at home. You could have robbed me and left the house, and the fact that you did not leads me to regard you as a very worthy youth."

"General," Dick returned, with dignity, "a feller who would hev took advantage of yer broke up state would 'a' been a Hottentot, an' though some would, I ain't built that way."

"Good! And now—excuse me, but you don't look like a rich boy."

Dick calmly turned one of his pockets inside out.

"That's my bank, mister."

"And empty! Your answer is brief and definite. Well, I take it you are not averse to earning money. How is it?"

"Correck! I'm lookin' fer ducats ef they comes honest."

"Then I will hire you, if we can make a bargain. Last night I was robbed of an important paper. I believe—in fact, I am sure—that I know the source of the attack, but I wish to get evidence to that effect. I want to send you on an errand to a certain man's house. The mission will be one requiring shrewdness, but I think you will meet with no danger."

"Is it ter git yer lost paper back?"

"No; for such an effort on your part would be folly. The errand is very simple, except that you will have to be at once polite, bold, natural, and ready to repel possible suspicions. In brief, you will go to one Cyrenus Slade and say that you are an office-boy for Park & Woodley, lawyers, and that your employers wish to know if Slade has yet gained evidence enough to go on with his lawsuit."

Dick closed one eye meditatively.

"General, wot's the riddle?" he inquired.

"I cannot give you particulars. Slade is my enemy, and we are liable to lock horns at law, at any time. If he says to you that he is ready I shall be sure that he's got my paper. That's all you need to know, for your errand is simple. You will run no risks."

"S'pose I git arrested fer false pretenses?"

"How can you?"

"Fer claimin' ter be office-boy ter Park & Woodley."

"Why, even if he disbelieves you, he will only refuse to talk with you."

"I ain't so sure o' that, but ez there don't seem ter be no great wrench at the hip-joint o' the law, I reckon I'll go ahead an' do the errand."

Goodwind's face brightened, and he expressed his approval of Dick's decision. He also gave more minute instructions, and made the boy's course as plain as possible.

Dick listened in due form, but he had another idea in his mind, and proceeded to work it at first opportunity. Pointing to the portrait he observed:

"I wish I's one o' them fellers."

"What fellows?"

"That makes sech pictur's."

"Oh! an artist. Well, the profession is open to all."

"That's a fine pictur'; looks as ef she was jest goin' to speak, b'jinks! Is she yer daughter?"

"I have no daughter."

"Niece, then, mebbe."

"No."

"The face kinder attracts me. Who is she?"

"No one you will see here," Goodwind returned, curtly.

"Is she alive now?"

"The matter is one of no importance, and we will dismiss it. Let the subject rest, and I will get you a more respectable suit of clothes. You would never pass for an office-boy in your present costume. And by the way, can't you improve on your English, and talk more like an educated person?"

"I kin sling on cart-loads o' style when I set out, boss," Dick avowed, without undue modesty.

He saw that his question in regard to the picture had irritated Aleck, and that the latter was not likely to give him any information, so he let the matter rest. He was, however, more interested than ever. He felt sure that Goodwind knew the girl he had rescued from the river, and that his host bore her no good will. The Night-Watcher then and there resolved to sift the matter to the bottom, and, if she had been wronged, to see that justice was done her. She was his charge now, he proudly felt.

Aleck took him out and purchased a suit of clothes, and Dick, for once, thought he looked unmistakably fine in the outfit.

At as early an hour as a visit from a lawyer's boy would be proper he was started off for Cyrenus Slade's residence.

"I'm in the swim," he soliloquized, as he went, "an' I'm goin' ter see the game through, though there's no knowin' w'ot measly diffikilties I may git inter. Cyrenus may set down on me with a dull thud. Anyhow, I'm goin' ter keep in with Aleck, an' find out why he sports that portrait. Wonder ef he's the pestiferous gent who tried ter drown'd the gal?"

The journey to Slade's was made without event of importance. He found that Mr. Slade lived in a better house than Goodwind, and suspected that the former had more money at his call.

He rung the bell, and when he told the servant that he was a boy from Park & Woodley, was at once ushered into the parlor to await the coming of the master.

It was a well-furnished room, and, when left alone, he looked around with natural curiosity. At first he found nothing to interest him greatly, but his wandering gaze suddenly became fixed, and an expression of astonishment appeared on his face.

On the wall hung a crayon portrait so much like that at Goodwind's that he could hardly believe it was not the same one!

"The gal ag'in, by jinks! Say, be I awake or dreamin'?"

Dick rubbed his eyes in bewilderment. It was odd, certainly, that the likeness of the mind-stupefied water-waif should be at Goodwind's, but it was far more that a copy should grace Slade's parlor.

"Cricketty-jim! but ain't I in it!" the eccentric Night-Watcher added, under his breath. "Both these men know the gal, an' you kin bet yer gallus-buttons there's a heap in all this! That's my opine."

The door opened and a man entered. He was, like Goodwind, past middle age, and carried over two hundred pounds of flesh and bone. He was well-dressed and somewhat pompous-looking. Dick did not fail to see that the new-comer was looking at him keenly, even suspiciously, he thought; but the boy was equal to the emergency.

"Mr. Slade?" he inquired.

"That's my name," was the curt response.

"I'm from Park & Woodley's—"

"Are you sure?" was the sharp interruption.

"Why, certain."

"Perhaps you are, but you will have to prove it or take the consequences. I suspect—"

Night-Watch Dick heard a slight sound behind Slade, near the door. He looked, and saw a young woman standing there. *The river-waif, or her double*—which was it? The resemblance startled Dick, and he forgot to listen to Slade, and could only look in bewilderment.

CHAPTER IV.

DICK HAD USE FOR HIS WITS.

RICHARD HENRY BRAZER did not have long view of the young woman by the door. When she saw she was thus under observation she turned away as suddenly as she had come, and disappeared from his view.

Oddly enough, Slade did not notice the abstraction and surprise of his visitor. For a moment the man's gaze had wandered, as he made some remark which Dick did not hear. The latter felt, rather than saw, when those keen eyes were again turned upon him, and he braced up suddenly to meet the danger.

He had seen a young woman enough like the river-waif to be a copy, yet, the observer felt sure, one who was wholly another person. The fact was surprising, but surprises were pressing upon him so fast that he was beginning to be prepared for them.

He rallied, and met Slade's gaze boldly.

"Have you a note from Park & Woodley?" the master of the house added.

"No, sir," Dick confessed.

"Yet you ask me to believe they sent you?"

"That's it."

"I don't believe it. I know all their employees. I never saw you before."

"I'm a new boy," explained Richard, candidly.

"That does not account for your coming without a note. I told Park & Woodley, long ago, that I would pay attention to no messenger unless he had a note from them."

Slade's regard grew more suspicious, but Dick's ingenuity was equal to the occasion.

"Being a new boy," he admitted, meekly, "I may have done wrong. Last night my bosses said to me I was to come here early in the morning on an errand to you, first off, soon as we opened up. Well, they didn't show up this A. M.

as soon as I did, so I thought I'd save time by getting in one errand ahead of them. If I've done wrong I'm sorry."

His meekness had effect, and Slade's expression grew less severe.

"What is the errand?" he asked, after a pause.

"They want to know if you're ready to go on with the lawsuit."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"I can answer that question freely. I am not ready. Matters stand just as they did, and I am still waiting. You can say to your employers, however, that I have confidence that I shall soon be all prepared for hostilities."

"All right, sir. Anything more?"

"Nothing. You can go, now."

Richard did not want to leave, but he saw no way to avoid it. He sent a glance toward the door, where the young woman had been, but did not again gain sight of her. Then he looked at the portrait on the wall. That object was less remarkable since he had seen the water-waif's double, but the fact that it was precisely like that at Aleck Goodwind's and that each was a fine likeness of the waif, made the matter still remarkable and perplexing.

He rose to go, but Slade regarded him critically.

"Do you expect to stay at Park & Woodley's?"

"I ain't no idee of changin'," returned Dick, forgetting for once to use good English.

"You are a keener-looking boy than the lawyer's previous one."

"He was kind of a dough-head," frankly returned Richard, recklessly libeling a youth he never had seen.

"I presume you are faithful?"

"Sure as a new gimlet."

"If Park & Woodley recommend you as trustworthy I may yet find work for you to do."

"You'll find me one o' the white hen's chickens," modestly asserted the Night-Watcher.

"We will see."

Slade had gradually moved toward the outer door, and they now stood in the hall. Just then the bell rung. Mr. Slade was not a man who would lower his dignity by opening the street-door to any applicant, so looked back to see if a servant was in sight, but Dick was ready to go, and he turned the knob and swung the door back.

A trim-looking boy stood on the stoop.

Ignoring Dick, the second youth bowed to Slade.

"A letter from Park & Woodley, sir," he announced, holding out an envelope.

Slade looked from the speaker to Dick, and back again.

"I thought you had left the firm."

"I, sir? Oh no!"

"Then what is *this* boy doing there?"

Slade indicated Richard Henry, and the second boy looked surprised and answered:

"Why, he don't work for Park & Woodley, sir. I never saw him before. Does he say he is with them, sir? If he does, he is an impostor."

Dick saw that he had been unmasked by this unlucky meeting, and the gathering scowl on Slade's face indicated that the latter might make it unpleasant for the pretender, but the latter was not at the end of his resources, yet.

"Young man," he pronounced, with great dignity, "what you don't know about them legal gents' private affairs would fill a bicyclopedia, b'jinks! You walk up ter their desk, ter-day, jest afore you go out fer yer frugal hash-an'-pretzels lunch, an' you will get p'inters by the quart. You will also get the g. b., which is grand bounce. On your way home you kin look fer another job, fer Park & Woodley are dead onto you, an' yer name is Dennis K. Mud, junior. See?"

This glib address alarmed the lawyers' boy, but Slade was not so easily convinced. All his suspicions returned, and he sharply averred:

"I believe you are lying!"

"Sir, down in Kentuck that's a fighting remark," declared Richard.

"You are not employed by Park & Woodley."

"Jest as you say."

"You came here as a spy, and I can surmise who sent you, but your trick will not succeed. I will have you arrested for your pains, and if you don't get six months on the Island I shall be surprised. Jones, look for a policeman, and get him here at once!"

Night-Watch Dick was troubled. He did not know what, if anything, was the penalty of his deception, but he valued his reputation, and did not want to get mixed up in any trouble. It

was clear that Slade intended to carry out his threat. How could he be beaten?

Dick thought of only one way. He was not sure he would hit the mark, but he determined to try the experiment. He took Slade by the sleeve.

"Cyrenus," he coolly began, "I've got one word fer your private ear, an' ef yer head is no leveler than the bottom of a bowl, you'll do well ter listen ter my warble. Ketch on?"

He winked wisely, and Slade first hesitated and then returned:

"You can speak."

Dick was about as much at sea as his companion, but he lowered his voice and made a bold push:

"Mister, there's a certain girl who looks enough like that portrait in yer parlor ter be its twin. I know where that girl is, but nobody else does. I've got command o' her fortunes, an' I mean ter push things ef you cut up rusty."

The last sentence would not have been added had not Dick seen that he had already made a center shot. Why it was he could not tell, but by the time he had spoken of the girl, and avowed that he knew where she was, Slade was troubled—more, he seemed alarmed.

But he made an effort and answered boldly:

"What do I know about such a person?"

"Shall I tell before him?" and Dick pointed to the other youth.

"There is no need of explanation," the owner of the house hastily declared. "You are all at random, but now that I have time for thought I am not disposed to molest you for what was, no doubt, a boyish joke. I'll not have you arrested."

"Thanks, awfully," Richard returned, with a grin. "I see you're a philanthropist, an' that's just the kind of a biped I like ter meet. I'll go now."

Slade looked at the lawyer's boy, and seemed inclined to request Dick to remain, but he was not cool enough to manage the affair properly, then.

The result was that he allowed the Night-Watcher to use his own judgment, and the latter lost no time in getting away.

"Wal, that's a close call," Richard soliloquized. "If it hadn't been fer my chance hit the old gent would 'a' fell on me with malice aforethought, an' I might 'a' been mashed inter a human pancake, b'jinks! Guess I won't do no more shady errands fer Aleck Goodwind. Et ain't healthful. But how does Cyrenus come in on the mystery of my water waif?"

He meditated on this point, but in vain, all the way back to Goodwind's. Once there he told all about his visit, with the exception of what occurred after the genuine office boy's arrival.

"Strange!" Aleck muttered.

"What is?"

"Slade hasn't my last paper, yet."

"Then you expected him ter hev it?"

"Certainly. I believe, as I said before, that he instigated the assault on me. But perhaps those who attacked me have not yet reported."

"Mister," returned Dick, earnestly, "w'ot is all this row about, anyhow?"

CHAPTER V.

MYSTERIOUS MAGOUN.

GOODWIND hesitated before replying.

"Oh! it's nothing," he finally returned, "except that Cyrenus Slade is my enemy."

"Is it a fight over money?"

"No."

"What then?" Dick persisted.

"Nothing that would interest you."

"But ain't I worked in your interest?"

"Certainly."

"Then why not let me inter the swim?"

Aleck shook his head emphatically.

"You have helped me, and I am going to pay you in hard cash, but my secrets are private property."

"How about *her*?"

Richard suddenly pointed to the portrait, but did not succeed in impressing Aleck as he had Slade. His companion betrayed only mild surprise.

"What you mean?"

"I know that gal is in the rifle."

"How do you know?"

"Wal, Slade has a pictur' jest like it—"

"I presume so."

"An' the original sets heavy on his mind. General, d'ye s'pose he would do her harm?"

"I don't know or care. Ask me no more questions about the matter, for I have nothing to say. As much as you have done for me I am not disposed to tell secrets which may result to my harm. Now I will pay you and let you

go, but I want your address, for I may want to employ you again."

He paid, and so liberally that Dick was not sorry they had met. The Night-Watcher accepted his rebuff and made no effort to learn more.

Feeling that he was on his way to success, already, he left the house and went back to where he had found a refuge for the water-waif.

When he entered it so happened that he did not encounter any of the family, but, entering the humble sitting-room, first saw the rescued girl. She was seated in an easy-chair and looked pale and down-hearted, but her face brightened at sight of Dick.

"Oh! I'm so glad to see you!" she exclaimed.

"So you know me?"

"You're the brave boy who saved me."

"I'm that goggle-eyed kid," Dick confessed.

"Now, I hope you've found out who you be."

"I have not."

"What? you don't remember nothin', yit?"

"Not a thing."

"That's bad."

"The past is all shut out from my mind. All that has occurred since I recovered consciousness on the pier is very distinct, as you will see, but back of that there is only a blank."

Dick experienced a feeling of keen disappointment. He had hoped that rest and sleep would restore her memory.

"Don't remember nothin' about goin' ter the pier, eh?"

"No."

"Nor about the other woman?"

"Not a thing."

"Ever hear of Aleck Goodwind?"

"Not that I remember."

"Or Cyrenus Slade?"

"No."

"Wal, b'jinks! we're in fer it, an' hev got ter worm our way by inches, I guess."

Richard rubbed his nose doubtfully, and felt that the "worming" process was a serious matter, but he was not inclined to give up. He was interested in the water-waif. She was about twenty years old, pretty, and naturally intelligent. Her helpless state appealed to all his sympathies, and he was determined to do all for her he could.

"Yes, sirree!" he asserted, "I'm in this fight ter stay, Miss—Wal, we don't know yer name, do we? S'pose we call ye 'Eve,' fer short?"

"Anything will do."

"Et's pretty late ter give ye a front name, but the first Eve was older than you when she was born, ef I rec'leck right. Et will do, anyhow. Now, I'll prance down ter the pier an' see ef there's anything new in that section. The patrolman who had that beat, last night, agreed ter be there this mornin', too, but he may got tired o' waitin' fer me an' turned his heels on the river-front. I'll see."

Dick went, but his blue-coated friend was not visible. The day patrolman had been told of the affair, and he said there was nothing new, but that the police were keeping the matter quiet, and hoped it would not get in the papers.

Observation of the pier and vicinity had brought nothing new.

So Richard went down on the structure alone and sat down where he had been at the time he first saw the unknown party, the night before. The dock was quiet enough, and gave no hint of the tragedy, but on Dick's memory was vividly imprinted recollection of the moment when the boat overturned.

He was meditating on the affair, and thinking of the woman who, he supposed, was drowned, when footsteps sounded beside him. He looked up and saw a man who looked as if he had just stepped out of a sporting paper that made a specialty of cuts of pugilists.

"Hullo, younker!" greeted this man.

"Hullo!"

"Fishin'?"

"Wal, general, when I fish I ginerally hev a hook an' line, or some other belongin' of the trade," and Dick held up his empty hands.

"Right, younker; never mind that. Been here long?"

"Wal, I ain't timed myself, but I guess no more than a day or two."

"Don't be so fresh, younker; you gives me a pain," returned the pugilistic individual, with a grimace; then he grew more mild of manner and added: "You's a likely lookin' lad."

"Mister, wot ax hev you ter grind?" Dick demanded, bluntly.

The stranger looked disconcerted.

"I ain't got none, an' dis is a square deal. I's only lookin' fer company 'cause I's lonesome an' pinin' fer a chance ter talk. See?"

"Oh! fire ahead, general; I ain't a-tryin' ter rebuff ye."

"Fine place, here."

"Yes. Wot yer peerin' inter the dock after? D'ye expect ter see a mermaid?"

Again the rough-looking man appeared disconcerted, but he pulled himself together.

"Et comes natural ter me ter take notice of the water, 'cause I used ter be a sailor. See?"

"Why, cert! I see, though I ain't much of a sailor, an' couldn't furl the anchor nor run the boom up ter the mast-head."

"You's a comic kid, an' I like sech. Now, I'll bet you know more than you let on erbout sailor ways. Ef not, you'll come to et. I've learned a good many things in my day. I've been a sailor, a miner, an explorer, a soldier, an' more things than you kin shake a stick at. Wot d'ye s'pose I be now?"

"You look like a bouncer in a one-hoss saloon."

This frank statement plainly irritated the stranger, but he overlooked it. He continued to talk in a way meant to be friendly. He said his name was Bat Magoun, and though he did not claim great wealth, or Knickerbocker blood, he conveyed the impression that Mr. Bat Magoun was equal to the best of the human race.

Dick had seen at the first that his good will was desired, and as Bat persisted in the attempt after repeated rebuffs, it became evident that the man had an object of no small importance.

Then, again, no matter upon what subject he talked, he had a habit of looking down into the water every few moments, his manner being furtive after Dick's pointed question at the beginning of the interview.

All this impressed the Night-Watcher, and brought vividly to mind the previous night's scene there, when the boat was overturned.

Was Magoun one of the men who had figured on that occasion, and had he returned to learn more about the results of that affair?

He was a man whose personal appearance made him a fit subject for all kinds of suspicions. He was rough and unkempt, and his heavy jaws, flat nose, small eyes and bulging brows did not make a prepossessing face.

Richard ceased to irritate him, and their acquaintance went on very smoothly, outwardly.

Finally Bat abruptly asked:

"Want ter go over ter my den?"

"Whar's that?"

"Tree or four blocks away."

"All right, general; heave ahead. I'm a gent of leisure, an' allays ready fer a change. We city men kinder git stagnated at times. See?"

Mr. Magoun agreed with this fully, and they left the pier and walked away. Dick was by no means certain that he was acting wisely, for his companion did not look like one who would let scruples stand in the way of a settled purpose; but as the Night-Watcher could not see what Bat was to gain by injuring him, he took the risk.

He was conducted to an old brick house whose exterior told of neglect, even as its interior spoke loudly of dirt. Dick had seen humble and poorly-kept homes before, but never one quite as bad as this house.

Mr. Magoun did not heed the dirt, but whistled a cheerful tune as they went up-stairs.

The room they entered was a little worse than anything seen before, and scattered around was an array of old clothes, sporting papers, boxing gloves, pipes, tobacco-bags—mostly empty—and other articles which almost bewildered Richard.

He was invited to sit down in an alleged easy-chair, but in the seat of which were divers springs which were all too prominent; and then Bat filled a pipe.

"Have a brain-weaker?" he asked, holding up a half-used package of cigarettes.

"I pass."

"Shows yer good sense. Pipes an' cigars is all wool an' a yard wide, but cigarettes ain't fit fer humans. Fift' Avenue dudes is jest their size, but I would prefer old rags from an Eye-talian den fer my smoke."

Bartholomew did justice to his black pipe and talked volubly, but Richard was sure that he had not been taken up for any trivial purposes. Finally his companion inquired in a careless way:

"Sa-ay, you's related ter Nick Brazer, ain't ye?"

"Yes; he's my uncle."

"An' he's an undertaker, ain't he?"

"Yes."

"S'pose I kin git him ter do a job fer me?"

"Wot kind of a job?"

"The fack is, my young frien', I've got a woman wot I want buried!"

CHAPTER VI.

DICK FACES A REVOLVER.

MAGOUN tried to make his manner careless and matter-of-fact, but the whole matter was so irregular that Night-Watch Dick looked at him in wonder.

"You've got a woman you want buried?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"Is she alive?"

"Great Scott! of course not. Wot would I want a live woman buried fer?"

"I can't see no pertik'ler need of it, myself. Wal, my unc is in the biz, an' you hev only ter step around ter his place an' give the order."

"I ain't much used ter cemetery joints," Bat confessed. "Couldn't you do the biz for me?"

Richard was not so simple as to remain unsuspicious in the face of this irregular proceeding, nor was he foolish enough to give utterance to his doubts.

"Mebbe," he returned, quietly. "Whar is the dead woman?"

"We don't jestly know where we will hev the obsequious ceremonies," was the answer.

Dick made a pretense of examining his shoe to see if it was sound.

"Wot did she die of?" he inquired.

There was a significant silence before the answer came, but the Night-Watcher did not betray undue interest by looking. Finally, Magoun replied:

"Drowned!"

Dick's eyes glittered. It might not mean anything, but he remembered how Bat had gazed down into the dock—the place where the boat had been upset.

"Sister o' yourn?" innocently inquired Richard.

"Naw! Old enough ter be my mother."

"Wal, ef you see my unc an' put up the scads, I kin promise he will give yer a funeral that'll make all yer neighbors green with jealousy," asserted Dick, assuming a "tough" air.

"That ain't the kind I want, younker. Ye see, the diseased wuz a modest woman, she wuz; an' she wuz so averse to vain show dat it wuz her last request that she should be buried humbly. Them wuz her dyin' words, an' jest like her."

Mr. Magoun sighed deeply. It occurred to Dick that they were rather singular last words for one who had perished by drowning, but he let the matter go.

His companion leaned forward on the rickety old table and went on:

"Yer see, we want this matter quiet, young feller. We don't want no show. We want her buried in the cemetery of the Evergreens, an' we will be there ter water the grave with tears; but we want yer uncle ter drive his wagon inter an alley wot is beside the house, load in from the side door, an' drive away modest-like, same as Aunt Matilda ordered. See?"

"You say she was drowned. Hez the coroner set onter the case?"

"No, but I've got a doctor's 'stiffycate that she died from nat'ral causes. See?"

He drew a folded paper from his pocket and passed it to Dick. The latter did not know enough about such matters to be able to tell whether it was in due form, but the name of the doctor signed to the document was enough. It was that of a person who bore a most unenviable reputation.

The Night-Watcher clearly perceived that Bat wished to work a scheme which he dared not have the light of day shine upon, and the only puzzling thing about the burial was the natural question, If he wanted a secret burial, why did he not follow the example of many a New York evil-doer who had acted before him, and sink the body in that holder of guilty secrets, the North River?

"Where kin my uncle call around an' make her ready fer the funeral?" Richard asked, carelessly.

"All yer uncle has ter do is ter drive inter the alley, take the box—which will be all ready—an' go ter the Evergreens; an' when he agrees ter do the work—do it ez I want it done—I'll say where he's ter drive. See?"

There was a half-sullen way about Bartholomew now which told that he did not want to be questioned further, and Dick was too wise to irritate him.

The Night-Watcher would have given a good deal to know where the unknown woman had been drowned, but Bat's furtive interest when on the pier was not forgotten.

Was the woman of the present case the same who had been "Eve's" companion?

Silence did more than questioning, for Bat, after a pause, slowly growled:

"New York is jest rotten! The city puts a lot o' blamed fools inter blue store-clothes an' brass buttons, an' gives 'em a club, an' them cusses goes nosin' around in honest folks' business."

"You mean the perleece?"

"Sure!"

"They be fresh."

"Fresh!" echoed Magoun, with a burst of temper; "Why, them devils don't give a feller no show fer life. His private affairs are meddled with, an' he can't breathe widout the lousy blue-coats measure his breath, ter see w'ot his chest kerpacity is!"

And to strengthen his assertion the speaker added a few violent remarks, which need not be put on record here.

At this moment a slovenly-looking woman opened the door and held a bit of pasteboard out toward Magoun.

"W'ot yer got there?" he growled.

"A visitin' card."

"A w'ot?"

"A card with a name on it, sech as stylish folks use w'en they go a-callin'."

"I b'lieve I've heerd o' them, but I don't care fer sech rubbish. T'row it away!"

"But there's a woman ter see yer, an' this is her name."

"Thunder!"

Bat's contempt changed to astonishment, and he went forward and took the card. Holding it to the light he studied it attentively, but as no ray of intelligence appeared in his face, Dick strongly suspected that the tough could not read.

"I'll go an' see her," he finally decided. "You stay here, young feller, an' I'll see yer ag'in pretty soon."

He went out, holding the card gingerly in his big fingers.

Richard did not know that he had any interest in the woman, and certainly saw no way of seeing her, so he settled down to await Magoun's return as patiently as possible. He had no intention of leaving. Magoun had interested him, and he wanted to learn the exact nature of the man's scheme.

"He's got a drowned woman that he wants put out o' sight on the sly," the Night-Watcher mused; "an' he was lookin' inter that pertic'lar dock as ef he expected ter see drowned folks cavortin' around there. The question is, Was Bartholomew in a certain boat when it keeled over an' spilt its load inter the wet?"

The sound of voices in the next room caused Dick's meditative expression to disappear.

"You kin set down there an' chin!" came in Magoun's voice, harshly.

A woman's voice answered, but Richard did not catch the words, and he obeyed a sudden impulse, and rose and went close to the wall. Their barrier was not thick or substantial, but the voices were now lowered so that he could not catch enough words to help him.

Bat and the woman were talking in ill humor, which was all he could make out for some time, but, presently, she grew angry and raised her voice.

"I say you are deceiving me!" she declared.

"Prove it!" Magoun retorted.

"Rather, it is for you to prove your innocence."

"That's my affair!"

"And mine."

"See here, d'y'e think you kin bulldoze me? I ain't built that way. See?"

"You are the one who is trying that course, but I wish to say that your efforts will avail nothing. You are a man, and I but a weak woman, but I can match you in one way, if not with brute strength."

"What way?" Magoun growled.

"By appealing to the law."

"I ain't broke no law."

"Do you want to prove it in court?"

"I want you ter hev some boss-sense!"

"It is because I have that very article that you are now kicking. I am wise enough to suspect that you're false to me, and playing into Cyrenus Slade's hands."

"Cricketty-jim!"

The breathless exclamation came from Dick, who thus gained fresh proof that Bat was connected with the characters of the original plot.

"Instead of keeping your promise," the unknown woman pursued, "you have spirited away the persons I paid you to bring to me. I say you are a traitor, and have sold your soul to Slade."

"Ef Slade paid over three cents fer it, he got cheated!" Dick muttered.

He pricked up his ears, eager to learn more, but at that moment a footstep sounded behind him. He turned quickly and saw a revolver leveled at him, held in the hand of a burly ruffian.

"Spy and listener!" the latter grated, "I'll stop your meddlin'!"

CHAPTER VII.

PLAYING A BOLD GAME.

NIGHT-WATCH DICK was taken aback. He had supposed while he had proof that Bat Magoun could not enter and catch him acting the listener he was safe enough, but, now, he had undeniable proof that he was caught, and by one not inclined to show mercy.

The new-comer looked like a fit mate for Magoun, and his face was even more brutal.

The revolver still bore upon the boy, and he had good reason to fear an immediate and fatal shot, but his presence of mind did not desert him.

Not betraying the trepidation he really felt, he put up his open hands.

"Hold on a bit, boss!" he requested. "I don't want no quarrel with you."

"Oh! you don't!" was the sarcastic retort.

"Wal, I didn't reckon you did. I'm the one that is raisin' my warble. Here a gent has took you in here as an honored guest, an' you go ag'in' him an' act the listener. The penalty o' that is lead!"

"Hold up, mister, an' I'll explain."

"How will you explain?"

This was just what Richard Henry Brazer wanted to know, for he had been caught so fully and squarely that he did not see how he was to save himself. He put his wits to work, however, and managed to grasp an excuse without any betraying hesitation.

"All I ask is a chance," he returned, assuming an air of resentment, "but it shakes a feller all up ter look inter a revolver an' see the bullet makin' faces at him, an' diggin' its toes inter the cylinder in an attempt ter git out an' gash his flesh; it does, b'jinks!"

"Come ter the point!"

"Turn that shooter away!"

Dick spoke commandingly, and the rough obeyed.

"Now, heave ahead, spy."

"I ain't no spy, but a feller took me in here an' used me decent an' square, an' when he went out I heerd a woman a-threatenin' on him in the next room—I didn't ketch the cause—so I made my mind ter take a hand ef there was any racket. I always stan' by my friends."

"You tell it wal, don't yer?"

"I don't ask you ter believe it. Jest you keep yer gun away, an' me an' Bat kin settle this."

"I'm Bat's friend."

"Do you use him ez you do me?"

"I always wing a traitor when I see one."

"Wal, this ain't your circus. Me an' Bat kin run it alone. All we ask o' you is ter mind yer own affairs. See?"

The man was not sure whether he saw, or not, but the Night-Watcher's bold stand had done more than any other course would. Dick had, at least, deferred trouble by his nerve.

After some hesitation the rough put up his revolver.

"You can sit down and wait for Bat," he announced, "but I'll see to it you don't listen no more."

"Oh! come off; you give me a pain, you do!" declared Dick, assuming a swagger suited to the society he was mixing with.

There was no answer, and Richard went back to the chair, put his feet on the table, and proceeded to make himself comfortable.

For awhile no particular attention was given him by the rough, but, presently, the latter began to study him unostentatiously. By putting on the airs of a hard young citizen, Dick had made the man suppose, faithful or not, his young companion was of an extremely vicious class in life, and for a boy of that kind, a man, like the present one, who lived by his wits, always had use.

But was the boy to be trusted?

In a short time, though no more of the conversation between Bat and the unknown woman was audible, they were heard to leave the room, and presently he re-entered the place where the others awaited him.

He greeted the second rough as "Tom," and then the latter promptly told what he had seen of Dick.

Bat scowled and looked ugly, but the object of their suspicion was equal to the occasion. He

coolly and nonchalantly made his explanation, and Magoun accepted it without much hesitation.

Really, he did not like the matter at all, but, being well aware that he had already put himself in Dick's power to a certain degree, he saw fit not to make trouble.

To bind the boy more fully to him and his interests, he proceeded to be very friendly, outwardly, and to give the impression that if a young fellow wished to get a good start in life he could do no better than be in union with Bartholomew Magoun.

Dick took all this for what it was worth, and acted the amiable part, himself, but Tom was not inclined to follow their lead. The second rough was disposed to let Bat manage his own affairs, but he could not forget the picture he had seen when he detected Richard with his ear pressed close to the wall.

He did not trust the boy in the least degree.

After considerable talk the Night-Watcher announced that he would go, and Bat did not object. The latter only asked that he would see his uncle at once, and Dick not only made the promise, but kept it. He went to the second house without delay.

His uncle, Mr. Brazer, heard the story with undisguised suspicion.

"The whole thing is an unlawful conspiracy!" he declared.

"Think so?" Dick returned.

"Of course. The doctor you name has served time in prison, and ought to be there now; he has considerable practice, but it is all in 'shady' cases. I would not apply for a burial permit on his certificate, nor would I handle a subject of his, in any case, where there was the least chance of my name being associated with his."

"I want you ter take *this* case, unc."

"I decline!"

"Oh! I'll stan' between you an' harm."

"Richard, you are getting too self-conceited, and I shall advise your father to spank you at nine o'clock, every night, and put you to bed, instead of letting you act the detective."

The Night-Watcher chuckled with delight.

"That's all right, unc, but you are a trifle off yer pedestal. I don't want you ter injure yer perlesh'nal rep, but jest lay a trap fer Bartholomew."

"How?"

"Carry out the first part o' his plan, an' then hev the perleece at yer elbow ter swipe the coffin."

Mr. Brazer looked thoughtful.

"Murderous Magoun has set out ter work an unlawful game," Dick pursued, "an' he will do it ef he has ter use the river fer a grave; which is jest about w'ot he *will* do ef yer show suspicion by refusin' of the job. Now, why not accept, right off, an' then slide around an' tell the perleece the whole biz, an' hev them at hand ter gobble the coffin, once you git hold o' it?"

Mr. Brazer's expression had changed during this address, and after a moment's thought, he readily answered:

"Your head is as level as usual, Dick, and I will follow your plan. We will do our best to foil this iniquitous scheme, whatever it may be. Perhaps your father had better not spank you."

Uncle and nephew laughed heartily, for they had the best of feeling for each other, and then they arranged their plans more fully.

It was agreed that Nicholas Brazer should see Magoun, and after sundry apparently cautious questions, as if he were guarding against danger to himself, he was to accept the duty of consigning the body of the unknown woman to the cemetery.

This matter being arranged, Dick went his way.

"I've got hold of a mighty big case, I reckon," he soliloquized, "but it's a big tangle. Eve, my water-waif, an' her companions who wuz in the boat are mixed in some way with Cyrenus Slade an' Aleck Goodwind, and ef Bat Magoun ain't in the same swim I'm 'way off my guessin' pivot. Got a drowned woman on his hands, hez he? An' he was lookin' down inter *that* dock as ef he expected ter see strange sights. R. H. Brazer, ef you kin git a hip-lock on this case, glory will be yours!"

The speaker wanted to be doing more active work, but, not seeing how he was to accomplish it, just then, he wandered down to the North River.

That noble stream had never looked more majestic, and he sat down and watched it thoughtfully. Few persons knew more of the water front than he. Since he began his peculiar work as an ally to the police he fairly haunted the vicinity between the Battery and Christo-

pher street Ferry, and its every peculiarity was known to him.

On this occasion he was interrupted by the arrival of a twelve-year old boy slightly known to him, and who rejoiced in the name of Bob Blinks.

"Hullo, cully!" Bob exclaimed.

"Hullo, general!"

"Takin' life easy?"

"I ain't takin' life, now."

"You know w'ot I mean. Anyhow, me an' you don't work much."

"No; we toil not, nuther do we spin, an' we don't keer whether bulls or bears ravage Wall street, seekin' whom they may devour an' eat up. I'd rather be a lazy man than a millionaire."

"Right you be, cully!"

Young Mr. Blinks agreed heartily, but Richard slyly winked his left eye. Believing that Bob did not know he was a hard worker in the police interests he enjoyed the sensation of posing as an idle nobody.

Several commonplace remarks were made, and then Blinks abruptly asked:

"Kin you read?"

"A few."

"Read writin'?"

"Why, cert!"

"Then I've got suthin' fer you ter peroose. Me an' Petesey O'Neil found a paper last night, an' Pete, he kin read jest enough ter make out et's about a money affair. One name on it is Aleck Goodsend, I believe, an' t'other is—"

Dick gave a start.

"Cyrenus Slade?" he inquired, quickly.

"I b'lieve that is it, nibsey."

"Where'd you git it?"

"Found it on the street."

Blinks mentioned the exact place, and it proved to be the corner where Aleck Goodwind was assaulted.

"We think, mebbe it's somethin' will bring us money," Bob added, "an' ef you kin read ink-straddlers I wish you'd come up an' tell us w'ot it's about."

Dick sprung up.

"I'm at yer service," he declared. "Lead on!"

CHAPTER VIII.

BREAKERS AHEAD.

BOB BLINKS set out with Dick by his side. The latter had but little knowledge of Bob, having only known him casually as one of the boys who frequented that vicinity, but of Petesey O'Neil he knew more. The latter was an honest youth who, to a certain degree, was Dick's friend.

The Night-Watcher was excited over the prospect of recovering the paper which Aleck Goodwind had lost, and felt that developments were sure to follow.

With the paper in hand he could gain some clew to the drama which connected Goodwind, Slade and the water-waif.

After a walk of several blocks, during which Blinks talked volubly, they reached an old house on a retired street. The door was not locked, and Bob opened it and entered.

He escorted Dick to a room on the second floor.

"Set down," he directed, "an' I'll git the paper."

Richard took a seat and his guide went out. The former was not long kept waiting. Bob returned, and with him was a stout, rough-looking man.

"Here we be!" Blinks announced.

"Where's the dockymint?" Dick inquired.

Blinks grinned broadly.

"Gness Petesey O'Neil's got it."

"Where's he?"

"Dunno!"

When the man first entered Dick experienced a suspicion that all was not well, and the triumphant look on both of the visages before him now added to the feeling.

"I'd thank you fer an explanation," he remarked.

"You shall hev it, cully. I don't know where Petesey is, nor anything about any paper. You hev had a game played on yer. See? We thought you wouldn't come here without we decoyed ye, an' we took dis way. See?"

Blinks chuckled gleefully, and Dick needed no more explanation. He glanced at the man, marked his evil face, and decided that he was in a very bad fix.

"I've been trapped, hev I?"

"That's it."

"Why?"

"'Cause you're too fresh."

"About what?"

"Never mind."

"You may as wai own right up. Yer talk erbout that dockymint, which you now say don't exist, tells the story. You used the names of Aleck Goodwind an' Cyrenus Slade ter decoy me. One o' them was at the bottom o' this!"

"Slade's the man!"

"Hush yer jaw!" interrupted Blinks's adult companion, sharply.

"W'ot's de use o' keepin' it back!" returned Bob. "I don't think Richie will ever tell on us. Ha! ha!"

He laughed in great amusement, as if there was some hidden, but big joke in his last few words, but the man remained grim and ugly.

"Gents," remarked Richard, "I admire a good practical jest, myself, an' though I've wore my shoes out somewhat in walkin' up here, I won't kick. Still, ef I don't go fishin' I shall disappoint a frien' o' mine, an' ez I want ter keep all my engagements, I'll ask yer out ter drink a lemonade with me, an' then I'll go home."

"No, yer won't!" the man declared.

"No?"

"That's it; no!"

"Why not?"

"You're my pris'ner!"

"Cricketty-jim! you don't mean it!"

"We have been ter some trouble ter decoy yer, an' we wouldn't done it only that we wanted yer. D'ye think we'll let you go, now? No, sir; we want you!"

"Where's Slade?"

"W'ot d'ye want o' him?"

"Want ter confab."

"He is not to be seen. He ain't here, an' don't figger in this case. Bob an' me are runnin' this biz, an' we know how ter do it. Bob, bind him."

Suddenly changing his tone, the rough as suddenly whipped out a revolver, and Dick saw it bearing full upon him. The hammer was raised, and one touch of the holder's finger would end the Night-Watcher's career.

Bob promptly produced cords and advanced to do the binding.

Richard saw himself fully in the toils, and the appearance of his older enemy was enough to show him how useless resistance, or argument, would be. Still, for form's sake, if nothing more, he entered a protest—in vain.

Subject to the revolver, he had to permit Bob Blinks to bind him.

"How is that, Jake?" asked the binder.

"All correct, an' we hev only ter carry out the rest o' the programme."

Jake advanced as he spoke, and, before his intention became clear, had jabbed a rude gag into the prisoner's mouth; a step which made the latter gurgle sundry protests in his throat which he could not put in words.

A motion from the leader sent Bob to a closet out of which he brought a common flour barrel. The removal of the cover showed the interior lightly filled with straw, and, also, that the barrel had been strengthened by extra contrivances inside.

"This fer you," Jake explained.

"Fer me? W'ot do I want of it?" Dick tried to ask, but the gag shut off all speech.

"We'll give him a jolly ride!" laughed Bob Blinks.

The prisoner looked at the contrivance with undisguised uneasiness. He did not know what they intended to do, but the uncertainty of the case rendered it all the more ominous. He noticed that several holes had been bored in the staves, and he judged these were to admit air.

Darkness was beginning to fall, and the captors lowered the shades and lighted the gas.

"Finish the job!" Jake ordered.

At this brief signal they lifted Dick and bore him toward the barrel. He struggled to the best of his ability, though without hope of success. This had no effect, and he was dumped down into the barrel. Then they arranged the sparse amount of straw so as to surround him on all sides, and began to replace the head of the barrel.

By this time he was in a perspiration. Life was as dear to him as to any one else, and he did not doubt that he was doomed as far as they could control his future.

Each stroke of the hammer emphasized this fact.

It was a most gloomy sound.

At last the work was done.

Dick had brought his mouth close to one of the auger-holes, the straw not being plentiful enough to prevent this, and he found he would have no trouble in breathing.

When the work was over he could hear the

voices of the men in consultation. Presently one of them left the room, and there was a long lull. He judged that half an hour had elapsed when his single guard was joined by other persons.

They came straight to the barrel.

The latter was lifted and carried away.

Dick vainly tried to call for help.

Mechanically he marked the course of the carriers. They went down the stairs and out to the street; they dumped the barrel into a wagon; the vehicle moved away with the horse at a trot. The barrel bounced about in the interior, and the Night-Watcher was off on the most lugubrious ride he ever had taken.

Was it his last ride?

He could not judge as to the progress of time, but, after being bounced about for some time, the wagon was stopped.

Again the barrel was borne away. Whither? And what did the dread journey mean to him? There was a pause, and he knew the barrel had been set down again. What meant its new, strange motion? What meant a peculiar splashing sound?

They were in a boat!

Brave Dick shivered. His fears suggested an explanation of all this. Was he to be drowned in the river?

The oars of the men struck the water and the boat moved away. Once beyond the pier it was caught in the strong current and tossed up and down until the prisoner's head swam dizzily.

On they went, and he decided that their course was nearly straight down the river. What did that portend? What, unless that the end of the affair was to come in the waters of the Bay?

At last the oars ceased to beat the water. The rowers moved. They had gone almost in silence, but now he heard the order given:

"Over with it!"

He believed it to be Jake's voice.

The barrel was lifted and poised for a moment in air. Then it fell with a splash, and Dick knew his worst fears were realized; he had been consigned to an unmarked grave.

Through the holes in the barrel came the water, and its contact quickly convinced him that, with these orifices, the barrel could not long float.

There was a sound of oars, and a voice hoarsely called:

"Good-by, meddler, an' give our compliments ter Davy Jones!"

Then the sound of oars grew fainter, and Dick was alone on the bosom of the bay, with the water steadily percolating into his prison and adding to his peril.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE DEATH-TRAP.

NOT one of those who had left Night-Watch Dick to his fate had any idea that he would ever again be seen alive.

Were they right? Had all hope departed?

Not at any time in his peril had Dick's presence of mind deserted him, and what hope he had entertained all rose from one fact which had occurred at the very start.

When Bob Blinks obeyed Jake's order and bound the prisoner the young rough had done his best to render the job thorough, but even then Richard noticed that the cords were not adjusted as an older, more experienced person would have placed them. Upon this fact he based all his hopes, and it was a great relief when Jake did not examine them.

Once in the wagon Dick had trusted to the rattling of the vehicle on the pavement to deaden any rustling of the straw he might make, and then began the effort to regain a measure of liberty.

After a good deal of work he freed his hands.

The gag was soon removed, but he could not very well get at his feet without danger of betraying himself, and he had done no more when he was cast into the water.

As he realized his peril fully he whipped out his pocket-knife and cut the cords around his ankles. He was now free from bonds, but still in the barrel.

He was not in a frame of mind to speculate calmly on just how long it would take the barrel to sink, but he was aware that he was getting wet, and that breathing was no longer easy.

He prepared for a final effort, which he had already planned.

Moving partially around he put his back against one side of the barrel and his knees against the other, and then with all his strength he essayed to burst the living tomb.

The barrel creaked, but did not give way.

Again he strained every nerve.

Then—

There was a rending sound, and it flew apart so abruptly that, almost in a twinkling, he found himself struggling in a wreck of staves and hoops. The water engulfed him, and he began to sink. Down, down he dropped! He tried to swim, but fragments of the barrel defied his efforts to cast them off. He grew alarmed; the water roared in his ears like the voice of doom.

But at last he was free.

His limbs moved strongly, skillfully.

He rose to the surface.

He drew in the fresh air in great gasps.

With the current of life once more flowing naturally, all his resolution returned, and he felt able to meet any danger that might follow. He looked around for the boat, but it was barely distinguishable, as the oarsmen pulled back toward New York.

He was further down the bay than he had supposed, and this fact led him to decide to swim to Staten Island. By doing this he would keep out of sight of the men, and, once there, could take a ferry-boat from St. George and return home.

The first part of this plan was quickly put into effect, and he moved southward. His adventure had not weakened him, and the pleasure of escape gave him a feeling of exhilaration which made swimming a light task.

In due time he was on Staten Island.

He was not sure just where he was, so, seeing a house somewhat back from the water-line, he walked toward it, shaking the water from his clothes.

"I'm a good deal better off than a dead man," he commented, aloud, "but it would be better for them skunks who barreled me up if I was down with McGinty, now. Job was a meek man, so be I, in spots, but when I see Jake an' Bob Blinks, ef I don't climb all over their necktie I'm a perjurer!"

He had reached the house, and now he knocked at the door. A woman appeared, gave one look at him and exclaimed:

"Sakes alive! you've been in the wet!"

"Yes, an' the wet has mighty near been in me," the Night-Watcher humorously replied.

"Do come right in, and we'll give you dry clothes. I never did see such a year for folks to get drowned, and half drowned. I'm glad you're alive, and we will help you out."

Richard had not planned to do any more than ask for directions, but the woman was kind and motherly looking, and he was not disposed to refuse such an invitation. He went in, and she conducted him to a room and brought from the closet a suit of dry clothes.

"These will just about fit you," she stated.

"Mum, you're the right kind, but I want ter git back ter New York as soon as I kin, an' I ain't got the collat'ral fer ter buy these clothes, mum."

"Don't you worry about that. We make a business of helping folks who get drowned, or half drowned, and you're one of them. Put on the dry clothes, and it will be all right."

"Mum, you're a trump card, b'jinks!"

Dick sent the compliment after her as she retreated to the door. She smiled and went out, and he was soon inside of the dry garments. He then rejoined her in the sitting-room.

"You shall have a good bed, to-night," she promised.

"You're very kind, but I've got ter git back home. I hev business ter attend to, an', thankin' you, I'll hustle. You see—Hullo! w'ot's that?"

"What?"

"That pictur'."

He picked up an imperial photograph from the table.

"That's our landlord, Mr. Slade."

Dick had been well aware that the picture represented Cyrenus Slade. He had recognized it at once, and became correspondingly interested. He was now seized with a desire to learn more about the original.

"So he's yer landlord?"

"Yes, just now; but we are going to leave here. He is a rich man who lives in New York, and he's a good landlord, but there are reasons why we don't want to remain here."

"Why?"

"Well, it's like this. This house is in dispute. Mr. Slade and a Mr. Goodwind are fighting over it, and we are tired of being on premises that are under a state of siege, as I may say."

"What are they fightin' fer?"

The woman hesitated for a moment. She felt that it was not a good plan to make private af-

airs public, but she liked to talk, and there did not seem to be any danger in being confidential with a boy.

"You see, this place once belonged to Mr. Gurdon Maclay. He died when in the prime of business life, and with many business schemes on hand. He had one plan to make this ground the so-called New York terminus of one of the great railroads that go West, and had matters so arranged that the company in which he was a stockholder is still trying to carry out his plan. If really carried out, this land will become valuable. Slade and Goodwind are both stockholders, and each claims control of this land, through papers from Maclay. Why they don't go to law, and settle it, I don't know. Slade has control now, to the extent of getting the rent paid over, but that's all."

Dick had listened closely.

"Is there a gal in the case?" he asked.

"A girl? Not that I know of."

"Hum!"

"Why do you ask?"

"I thought mebbe there was. Ain't somebody got a daughter?"

"Your question is indefinite; but I do not know that either Slade or Goodwind has a child."

"Tell me all yer do know."

"I have. You've got the whole story."

Dick was disappointed, and his expression showed it. He had hoped to learn of his water-waif.

Suddenly the woman started and exclaimed:

"Why, there comes Mr. Slade now!"

The door-bell rung.

CHAPTER X.

PERIL FOR THE WATER-WAIF.

NIGHT-WATCH DICK heard the woman's announcement with a start. He believed that he owed his late perilous adventure to just the man who was now said to be at the door, and the latter's untimely arrival might indicate that the gang was again on the Night-Watcher's trail.

"Slade here!" Dick exclaimed. "W'ot does he want?"

"I don't know. I'll see," the woman replied.

"Wait a bit! Be you his friend?"

"No. I don't like him."

"Me, too! Say, mum, I hev reason ter feel like keepin' out o' that vampire's clutches. I never did him no harm, but he has me. Kin you hide me, an' say never a word ter him that I'm here, or that you hev seen a half-drowned kid o' my size?"

"Certainly. Step into yonder room and I will not mention you."

Richard got out of sight in a hurry, and then, as the bell rung a second time, the woman went to the door. She soon returned with Slade. Dick had never fancied the man, but the coloring of personal grievance now entered into the matter, and the visitor appeared repulsive and villainous.

"Mrs. Snow," began Slade, abruptly, "how do you like this house?"

"It is a very pleasant house, sir," she returned.

"Good! How would you like to live in it one year, rent free?"

"Don't I pay my rent, sir?"

"You do, madam; excellently well. Still, a house rent free is better than a paid house. Now, I can give you free rent if you will help me out on a certain matter. Wait, madam! Hear the condition before you answer, and then you are likely to answer yes."

"But how can you make it free? You control, but don't own, the place."

"I should pay the rent out of my own pocket, which I am quite ready to do. Your part of the bargain would be to keep a boarder for a time—perhaps a week; more likely, a month; possibly, a year. If the time run on until her stay seemed to be robbing you of a good bargain, I would pay you direct any sum you wished for. I say 'her' stay, for the boarder is a young woman."

"A friend of yours?"

"No."

"Then why are you arranging for her?"

"Because she is my enemy!"

Slade spoke bluntly, and Mrs. Snow would have been dull not to see that some underhand work was contemplated. She was an honest woman, and was about to decline all connection with the affair, but curiosity led her to seek for more light before declining the offer.

"People are not apt to be so kind to their enemies," she observed.

"The young woman may think there is not much kindness in my method," he answered, grimly. "The fact is, she is not to have her

liberty. She is, to speak plainly, to be a prisoner."

Mrs. Snow was shocked, but she managed to hide her feelings.

"Who is this woman?" she asked.

"She belongs in New York. Her name need not be mentioned now, though she doubtless will tell it to you freely enough when you get her here. I trust you will not judge me harshly in this case, madam, for I should be reluctant to do harm to any one, but she is very offensive, and has made my life a burden. She would upset important plans of mine, and must be put aside for a time. No harm will be done her, however. Will you take her?"

Mrs. Snow had waxed indignant, and was about to refuse point-blank, but at that moment she caught sight of a sharp young face behind Cyrenus Slade, and at the door of the next room—the face of Richard Henry Brazier.

Dick nodded sharply, and the lady caught the spirit of his plan.

She pretended to hesitate, and finally replied:

"Will there be danger for me?"

"Not a bit," Slade assured.

"I might do it, I suppose."

"If you will, you shall be well paid. I want a quiet place for the girl, and will relieve you of all care, except what naturally falls on a landlady. I will send a man along—whose board I will pay—and he shall be the one to watch the girl."

It was evident that Slade was prepared to spend his money freely in the case. The whole affair was one which shocked Mrs. Snow, but another nod from Dick decided her.

"You will stand between me and harm, sir?"

"Certainly," Slade declared.

"Then I will take the—boarder."

Slade was pleased, and he said as much. He had not been quite sure of Mrs. Snow, though, as money was his own god, he believed it would accomplish almost all things with others. He had tried, and succeeded.

So he thought.

He remained for some time longer, and stated just which room the prisoner was to have, and what was to be done.

"Go it, Old Hickory!" muttered Night-Watch Dick, in his ambush. "I kin guess w'ot gal you are aimin' ter incusserate in durance vile, but you ain't got my water-waif yet—not by a six-legged jack-rabbit's jump!"

The visitor was done at last, and he rose to go. Mrs. Snow saw him to the door, where they separated, but she had no sooner relocked the door than Dick's hand fell upon her arm.

"I'm off ter foller that Malay pirit!" he exclaimed, hurriedly. "I think I know the gal he's seekin' ter devour, an' he's the meanest man that ever chawed pork. I'll see yer ag'in, but do you keep right on in the work an' receive her, ef she comes. Will yer?"

"Yes."

"All right; but I don't guess he will git her, by gravy! He's a pirit, an' we'll beat him ef we kin. How's that, mum?"

Mrs. Snow caught the speaker's enthusiasm, and answered affirmatively. Dick hurriedly gave his name and address, and asked her to notify him if there was anything new; and then he hastened away in pursuit of Slade.

He had no difficulty in getting sight of him before the ferry at St. George was reached, and there he made a new discovery. A big, rough-looking man was lounging by the gate, and Dick recognized "Jake." The latter joined Slade.

Dick no longer doubted the origin of the attack upon himself, that night.

The police assistant determined to take the same boat with them back to New York, and this the large size of the craft enabled him to do with some degree of safety.

When they were once on board, the men began to talk earnestly. Dick watched them at a distance, ready to change his position if they changed theirs. He was not compelled to play hide-and-seek, however.

On arriving at the Battery the men left the boat and walked up Broadway. Dick kept patiently on their trail, and what followed did not surprise him in the least.

When they paused it was in front of his own home.

Dick then did some quick work. The house was on a corner. He entered by the side door, passed through to the room next to the men, and stood by the window only a few feet from them.

The blinds were closed, but the lower sash was raised. Thus he could hear all that was said.

"I think the plan will work," Slade remarked.

"You're sure the gal is here, be you?" Jake asked.

"Oh! yes; she has been seen here. In some way she was rescued by the young cub you drowned to-night. I'm glad he is out of the way."

Richard Henry smiled grimly.

"Wal, I'll agree ter get the gal ter-morrer night," promised Jake, "unless the folks here is kept up a-grievin' fer the kid."

"They would be fools to do it."

"The kid was bright, anyhow."

"But not enough so to beat you."

"Not much," Jake agreed, complacently.

"Get this job off your hands as soon as you can, and then look to Bat Magoun. I am sure that knave played me false. I do not for a moment doubt that he attacked Aleck Goodwind and got the paper away, but if so, he is holding it, himself."

"I never did like Bat, an' I'll smash him with pleasure. Et's right in my perfesh'nal line, ye see," Jacob added, with dignity.

"All right, but attend to the girl, first."

"I'll gobble her ter-morrer night."

"Good! Now, let's move on, and avoid all risk of discovery."

They went, at once, leaving Dick chuckling in great good humor.

"Gobble her, will ye?" he muttered. "Not ter-morrer night. I'll hev a whole regiment of perlece, ef necessary. An' so it reely was Cyrenus who set the robbers on ter Goodwind? That's prime! I like dead-sure facts when I kin git them, an' I'm gettin' points enough on Cy ter fill up a war-bulletin from Europe, b'gosh!"

The door-bell rung, and Dick answered it. He found his uncle, the undertaker, there.

"News for you, Richard," was the announcement. "I have further word from Bat Magoun, and he wants the burial to take place this very night."

"I s'pose you said Yes?"

"The fellow's ignorance so surprised me that I almost told him that cemeteries had rules and regulations which would make such a head-long course out of the question, but as he did not know any better, I thought it just as well to say nothing!"

"Unc, you show a proper degree o' hoss-sense, an' I'm proud o' you!" Dick declared. "An' is the funeral reely goin' on?"

"I am to go to a specified point, at one o'clock, and get the coffin."

"Prime!"

"Of course we'll have the police on hand."

"Wait a fraction. Did Bartholmew plan ter take passage with yer ter the cemetery?"

"No; he said he would trust all to me after he once delivered the coffin to me."

"Jim-hickey! then we won't hev no perlece inter it. I like the blue-coats, an' them an' me pull tergether like two expert car-hosses, but it's a lurid fact that the perlece usually make a botch of their jobs. They tell the reporter fellers, an' then the newspaperers publish the facks from Gowanus Bay ter Walla Walla, an' put every crook on his guard. D'ye foller me, unc?"

"You state only the truth. But what is your idea?"

"Take the coffin right ter your shop."

"And then?"

"See who it is—ef anybody! W'ot ef the coffin should be empty?"

"Richard, I always thought you a frivolous humbug, but you have a long head, after all. I'll do as you advise, and you shall aid in the adventure."

CHAPTER XI.

THE COFFIN CLEW.

MIDNIGHT was close at hand, and preparations were begun for the next step. Bat Magoun had been anxious that no one should know what kind of a burden he was getting rid of, and had stipulated that Mr. Brazer should have a wagon of innocent appearance, rather than a hearse.

The outfit was made ready, and at the appointed hour the undertaker and Dick started for the scene of action.

On their arrival they found the alley to which reference had been made, and Brazer drove into its shelter. A side door opened and Bat Magoun appeared.

"So you've come?" he spoke, somewhat nervously.

"I never am late at a funeral," Brazer dryly answered.

"Everything seems clear, don't it?"

"Clear?"

"I mean, nobody seems unduly interested in the case. Eh?"

"Only us three are in the game. Don't be worried. Bring out the freight!"

Brazer spoke in an off-hand way, to give the idea that he was indifferent to the finer feelings of life, and Magoun breathed a sigh of relief. Law-breaker and rough that the latter was, he feared detection enough to be timid now the rest of the job was to be intrusted to a stranger. It was a good deal of satisfaction to hear Brazer speak like one both bold and unscrupulous.

"Ef you'll give me a lift on the box, Dick kin stay with the team," Bat suggested.

This plan being approved of, Mr. Brazer went in, but he, Magoun and another man soon appeared carrying a rough, coffin-shaped box. This was duly placed in the wagon, and when the latter was closed at the back part the cover concealed the gruesome load from the chance passers on the street.

"Anything more?" Brazer asked.

"Yes; wait a bit."

The two principals hurried into the house, but returned, presently, carrying a slab of marble.

"Put this at the head o' the grave" Bat directed.

"Is it inscribed?"

"Yes; all ready for use."

The stone was put into the wagon, and then Magoun said that nothing remained undone. He had several warnings to give, however, and grew so nervous that he once spoke of taking the trip with the others; but when the undertaker carelessly remarked that it was unnecessary, Bartholmew changed his mind.

Dick was nervous lest some mischance should rob them of their prize, but Brazer took things coolly, showed no haste, and finally backed his horse out of the alley as nonchalantly as if the business was trivial.

"Be careful!" Bat continued.

"All right."

"Dodge all the cops you can."

"Yes."

Brazer touched up his horse and drove away. The last that was seen of Magoun he was looking after them anxiously.

"He's afraid he will git snaked inter perlece-quarters," Richard commented, "but I ain't no pity fer him. Great Scott! w'ot sort of an innocent is he ter think folks kin go ter the cemetery an' bury coffins ez off-hand ez they would goats in Harlem?"

Mr. Brazer did not test Dick's knowledge of the art of interring Harlem goats, but drove on steadily. Now and then they passed a patrolman, but none of them gave particular heed to the orderly team, and in due time they drove into the passage connected with the undertaker's shop.

The Night-Watcher made haste to close the big door next to the street, and then they were free from observation.

"There's letterin' on that gravestone!" Dick then announced, "an' I want ter see it. I want ter know why they mean ter advertise her death ef they want the burial so secret. Bat is pretty foxy, but he ain't the only gent in this case."

Armed with a lantern he climbed into the wagon again. The first thing that impressed him was the fact that the stone was not fresh and clean, but dingy, and patched, here and there, with bits of moss, as if it had been in use for some time.

He read this inscription eagerly:

"MARGARET ALDRIDGE,

AGED 49.

Born Aug. 12, 1837,

Died Nov. 23, 1886."

"What do you make of it?" Mr. Brazer asked.

"Say, be I ahead o' time, or is this the year 1889?"

"It is 1889."

"Wal, this stone says she died in 1886."

"That's odd."

"I reckon it wa'n't so odd when the stone was cut. Ef I ain't 'way off my reckonin' that article has been in use before. Et ain't fresh in no way, an' et strikes me it may hev done duty already at the head o' some mound."

The undertaker gazed thoughtfully at the stone. He noted the facts mentioned by his nephew, and his judgment confirmed all that Dick had surmised.

"He wants people to think that the death occurred three years ago," Brazer murmured.

"But why?"

Dick shook his head.

"I give it up."

"And how does it happen that the stone was cut three years ago—as seems probable?"

A flash of intelligence came to Richard's face. "Say, ef there is a woman in that box, she is, accordin' ter Bat's plan, ter be buried under a name that wasn't hers."

"By George! that's the idea!" Brazer agreed. "It is just the scheme they are trying to work. She and Margaret Aldridge were two different persons, but the idea is to have it that somebody died three years ago, instead of now. Puzzling, very puzzling; but you have undoubtedly struck the main facts of the case."

"I opine that the coffin ain't got a human in it."

"You may be right; we'll see."

Brazer procured tools fitted to that use and forced up the cover of the box. Inside was a regular coffin, and he next gave attention to the cover of that receptacle.

He raised it carefully.

"Gee-whillikens!" Dick exclaimed.

"You had better stand back, Richard."

"I ain't nervous."

Mr. Brazer had seen just what of all things he did not expect. In the coffin was a skeleton. Around it was wrapped a woman's faded and mildewed dress, and an abundance of human hair lay near the head.

"They've dug up a person long dead!" Richard uttered, with a lowered voice.

But the undertaker, after a long glance, made answer:

"Thank heaven, it is not so bad as that. Your suspicions are natural, but incorrect; my long experience enables me to say this confidently. We have here another trick on Magoun's part. Seen now, it looks as clumsy as most of his work, but if he had succeeded in getting the coffin consigned to the earth, a few years might have made the cheat plausible."

"W'ot is the riddle?"

"The things you see here were all gathered especially for this occasion. The appearance of the skeleton leads me to believe it was obtained from a doctor, or medical student, and it is likely that the same doctor who gave the certificate also furnished this object. Possibly, he gave the hair, too, while the dress may have been from any source."

"You figger it up naturally."

"And correctly. No grave was robbed to get these things."

Both investigators experienced a feeling of relief. Whatever might be the scheme of the crooks, there was no grave-robbing further than the taking of the head-stone.

The coffin contained no further evidence.

When satisfied that they had found all that could be gained, they stored all these articles in an out-of-the-way place, and their work was done for the time.

"I'm goin' ter find out who Margaret Aldridge was," declared Dick, as he prepared to go home. "Fer ter-morrer my work is ter look up the history of Gurdon Maclay, an' the job ought not ter be hard, fer he was a land-owner an' railroad schemer. Once I git his history, I guess I'll hev plenty o' light."

CHAPTER XII.

THE SKULKER'S KNIFE.

A FARM-HOUSE in New Jersey, a few miles from the North River; an old man, sitting on the piazza, dozing in the sun.

Richard Henry Brazer walked into the yard, and to the house; and his footsteps made the old man stir out of slumber.

"Is Mrs. Cummings in, sir?" Dick asked.

"My daughter, sir; my daughter," returned the old man, in a cracked voice. "No, sir; she isn't in. Gone away for the day; gone away. I'm alone, except the children. I am Napoleon Jones, at your service: N. Jones, formerly fish-merchant."

"I'm sorry Mrs. Cummings is away."

"I can do the business, sir; can do all business. Yes, yes; I was a business man. Fish-merchant, at your service. Business man! Speak out!"

Dick saw that his companion was no longer of strong mind, but he decided to come to the point.

"I wanted to ask Mrs. Cummings if she ever knew anything about the late Gurdon Maclay."

"Did she? Why, she was his housekeeper."

"So I've been tol' in New York, an' I come ter her as one likely ter know as much of his private affairs as anybody else. Do you think she could enlighten me, sir?"

"She could tell you all about him, young man. All? No, no; for I am the only person that knows all! I know a secret about him that I never told to a living soul. Ha! ha!"

Mr. Jones laughed gleefully.

"Wot wuz the secret?" Richard asked.

"I'll tell ye, but don't you betray me. Maclay died and never made it known, and of course I can't. He pledged me not to tell it, and I won't. But—he was married!"

Dick had no means of knowing whether Gurdon Maclay had been married once or a dozen times, but he answered encouragingly:

"Oh! was he?"

"Yes; to Margaret Aldridge."

The Night-Watcher's eyes glittered. It seemed there was more than idle babbling in the old man's talk.

"Who was she?" the boy asked.

"A young girl then; pretty, nice, and as fine a girl as you would meet in a day's walk. At least, the one he married was. There were two of the name, cousins; both named Margaret Aldridge."

"What became o' her?"

"I don't know. There was trouble and unhappiness, and Maclay died so sudden that he never mentioned the marriage, and if she was living, she never claimed her rights. Yes, yes; they had trouble, and I always believed the other Margaret Aldridge was at the bottom of it. Yes, yes!"

"Did you ever know Bartholomew Magoun?"

"No."

"Or anybody named Slade or Goodwind?"

"They were stockholders in one of Maclay's business ventures."

"But not connected with him or the two Margarets, eh?"

"I never heard that they were."

"Tell me all you kin about Maclay an' the two Margarets, will yer?"

"That isn't much. In those days Gurdon Maclay was a young man, with a strict old father to please: the old gentleman being rich, and bound to be master while he lived. Young Maclay met the two Margarets, and fell in love with one. He married her, too, but dared not make the fact public. They were happy for awhile, but finally drifted apart. What the trouble was I never knew, but, as I said before, I believe the other Margaret Aldridge was the cause of it. I think she loved Maclay, too, and made trouble between her cousin and Maclay."

"What more?"

"That is all I know."

"Who kin tell more?"

"Nobody!"

"But where did the good Margaret live, after she married Maclay? She must hev had a landlady or a servant, didn't she? Where are they, now?"

"Dear me, yes; there was a landlady; a woman named Mrs. Ray; but what became of her I don't know."

"How long sence you see her last?"

"Must have been nearly twenty years. I remember she was taking care of Maclay's child when I called there on some errand."

"So there was a child?"

"Yes; a daughter."

"By his marriage ter Margaret?"

"Oh! yes. If she is now living she must have grown to be a young woman. Dear me! what an unhappy affair that was! Parents make a big mistake when they interfere with the marriages of their children. Who is to marry, anyhow, the child or the parent? No one picked out my wife but me, and old Stuyvesant Maclay made a big mistake when, by trying to run his son's affairs, he was the means of the latter marrying secretly. Had the marriage been public it isn't likely the young folks ever would have quarreled."

The speaker rambled on, but Dick no longer listened. The fact that the Maclays had once had a daughter put strange ideas in his mind.

Where was she now?

Who was the water-waif?

Was there any connection between the two?

Dick was aware that he was making a surmise which might have no foundation in fact, but it was but natural. He plied the old gentleman with other questions, only to find he had exhausted the supply of information. He also learned that his daughter had never served Maclay as housekeeper after the latter's marriage to Margaret, and, hence, had no knowledge of the private affairs of that day. Jones could not suggest any one else who would be likely to give information and help, and so, reluctantly enough, the Night-Watcher took his departure.

As he disappeared down the road the old gentleman exclaimed:

"I declare! I forgot to ask why he wanted to know all this. But it don't matter."

Dick walked along without any very clear idea of the route he had taken. When once he

headed for home his thoughts became centered upon what he had heard, and he believed that daylight was beginning to fall on the mystery a little.

If Bat Magoun could be induced to speak and tell why he had been so anxious to plant a gravestone to the memory of Margaret Aldridge, another great step would be gained.

But which Margaret did Bat know of? One of the cousins had parted with that name when she married Maclay. Had one of them really died November 28, 1886, according to the headstone? If so, which?

The wife of Maclay never had claimed her rights. Had she died and been buried under her maiden name, or was it the other Margaret?

The Night-Watcher aroused as he reached a turn in the road. When going toward Mr. Jones's he had learned that a good deal of travel could be saved by taking a path which crossed the field, there, and he now acted accordingly. He went on with quick steps.

After a few rods he entered a piece of sparse woods. The trees were large, but not so thick but that grass grew by the way, and only where there was an occasional thicket was free view obstructed.

Dick, however, did not look behind him, and he missed seeing the, to him, most important sight of all. He was not alone in the wood. As he went, a man suddenly fell in behind him, and began the task of overtaking him by means of quick, silent steps.

The man was one upon whom Nature had branded an unenviable mark. His coarse, brutish, evil face was that of one lost to all the nobler impulses of life, and which betrayed the habitual criminal.

In his hand he carried a long-bladed knife, and his eyes gleamed ominously as he cut down the distance between him and Dick, the soft turf deadening the sound of his footsteps.

Nearer yet he came, until only a few feet separated him from the prey he coveted.

Nothing told the Night-Watcher of his danger—nothing, until a twig suddenly snapped under his feet. At this note of alarm he sprung forward with uplifted hand. Then, too, Dick wheeled suddenly.

The knife gleamed almost in his face.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT THE KNIFE DID.

NIGHT-WATCH DICK recoiled. The uplifted knife was bad enough, and the face back of it told of unrestrained passions. He appeared to be face to face with death, and the danger came so suddenly, so unexpectedly that he had no time for coherent thought.

He was like one chained to the ground, and incapable of motion. Every instant he expected to feel the touch of that murderous knife. What followed was astonishing.

The would-be assailant uttered a yell of strange inflection, and then, as Dick saw an expression of terror appear on his face, he turned and fled madly, his long bounds taking him rapidly away.

But it seemed that it was a blind flight, for the Night-Watcher saw him plunge into a thicket. There the way was tangled, and his foot caught on some obstruction—he tripped and fell heavily.

Mechanically Richard watched, expecting to see him rise, but this he did not do. Instead, he lay writhing on the ground, as if suffering from some deadly injury. The observer did not grasp the truth for some time, but as he saw that the man's hands, which were clasped to his breast, were gradually assuming a red hue, realization of the truth came to him.

The fellow had fallen upon his own knife and received a severe wound.

Richard could not see that he need be interested in the fortunes of such a person, and he would have gone on his way had not the recent occurrences so excited his curiosity. Why had the unknown paused in the moment of success and fled in terror?

"I'll hev a look at him, anyhow," the boy decided.

He went forward. The man had ceased to roll about, and, groaning dismally, lay motionless upon his back. One look was enough for Dick's face to light up with recognition; the fallen man was "Jake," the leader of the party that had consigned him to death in the bay.

"Hullo, general!" he exclaimed.

Jake's eyes opened.

"Et's his ghost!" he groaned.

"Ghost o' Christopher Columbus! Wot d'ye mean?"

"It's said the grave gives up its dead, an'

even the deep waters o' the bay can't keep his ghost down!" the bravo added.

Light broke upon the Night-Watcher.

"Say, I ain't so much ghost ez you take me ter be. I'm the healthiest spook in New Jersey, b'jinks! Get a move on, Jacob, an' don't be catawaulin' erbout any fossilized old ghost!"

Jake's eyes opened wider, and after a long stare the truth dawned upon him.

"Alive!" he muttered.

"An' kickin'," Richard assured.

"But I thought—I thought—"

"That you could drown'd me by barrelin' me up an' droppin' me in the bay? Not much, you couldn't, general; I'm all right, ye see."

"An' you've got the best o' me; you, a mere child, an' I a strong man. I was goin' ter rob ye; only rob ye, fer I used the knife only ter scare ye. See? You was so wal dressed!"—Dick then wore the clothes given him by Goodwind—that I didn't know ye. I thought you's some rich man's son, an' I crept up ter rob ye, but when yer turned an' I see yer face I thought it was a ghost: an' it scared me sick. I took ter my heels, but fell. Yee, I fell; an' I'm a dead man. The knife has gone through my heart."

Richard suspected that the wound was not mortal, for Jake did not seem to lose strength; but he did not say so.

"Your conscience must trouble ye," he remarked, insinuatingly.

"Conscience I know not, but I fear! I fear death; I fear the awful things ter foller! Oh! that I could avert the doom which will be mine!"

"So you've been a tough one, hev you?"

"My soul is black with crime!"

"Like wot you've done fer Slade, eh?"

"He led me on; he was to blame. But I did not mean ter drown'd the woman in the dock. Slade says the gal escaped, an' I am glad of it."

"But the woman was drowned?"

"I suppose so."

"How did it all happen?"

"Slade wanted ter git the gal out o' the way. The woman was her enemy, too, though the woman did not trust in Slade, and was reluctant ter help him, but he coaxed or scared her inter it. The plan was ter take the gal from New York, in a row-boat, ter Staten Island, an' the woman went erlong so the gal would not suspect danger."

"A decoy, eh?"

"Kinder that. But when we left the carriage, nigh the pier, the gal objected, not likin' the look o' the river front. We persuaded her, an' all went wal until we was in the boat. Then the woman herself got scared. All her suspicion come back, an' she vowed she would scream fer help ef we didn't set her on the pier ag'in. I grappled with her an' tried ter keep her still, but over the boat went, spillin' us all in the water."

Dick nodded sharply. That scene was very vivid to him, as he witnessed it the opening night of this story.

"Me an' my pals was afraid o' bein' gobbled by the perleece," Jake went on, "an' we swum away ez fast ez we could. Somehow, it seems, the gal was saved, but I reckon the woman was drowned."

"Wot was their names?"

"The gal was Olive; her last name I don't know. The woman was named Margaret Aldridge!"

Margaret Aldridge! How the name sprung up in odd places and odd ways.

"An' she was drowned?" Dick murmured, half-unconsciously.

"She must 'a' been, an' I don't see how the gal got away. Mebbe she could swim."

"Why did Slade hate her so?"

"I think it was more that he wuz afraid o' her; et looked that way. He was afraid o' Margaret Aldridge, too, but he had bound her to him by money, yer see. Sech a hold ain't never safe, an' he was afraid she would turn ag'in him. He was right glad ter hear she was drowned. I don't know why et was," added Jake, with a groan, "but the affair by the pier has ha'nted me ever sence. We could hev saved the woman, but we swum away an' left them ter drown'd. Ever sence I see them in my dreams. Their voices ring in my ears, an' their white arms beat the water. I reckon they will ha'nt me in the next world!"

He groaned again, and closing his eyes, lay in a species of collapse.

Richard had not changed his opinion of the fellow's wound. Jake's voice did not weaken, and he now and then moved his arms freely. His manner was not that of a man wounded to his death, and the Night-Watcher did not believe such was Jacob's condition.

The rough had simply been terribly alarmed

by seeing what he, in his ignorance and superstition, thought was a ghost; and when the wound followed, he had magnified the injury, and lost all his nerve.

Dick questioned him further, but elicited nothing of importance. He had never seen, or heard, of Slade until recently, and knew nothing about the latter's secrets.

The Night-Watcher decided that he wanted no more of the bravo, so he prepared to leave. Jake was very humble, and when the former promised to send help to him, he accepted the offer eagerly.

Richard went his way, and duly notified the nearest neighbor, who promised to visit Jake and "see what was left of him," and then the messenger went back to New York.

He first visited his uncle, and, together, they considered all that had been learned. This was not enough to enable them to grasp the mystery, but it gave material for fresh speculation. Coming down to Jake's case, it suggested to Dick the inquiry:

"How about the abduction of my water-waif, which Jake was ter try fer Slade? Is the engagement now off?"

"Looks that way."

"I'm sorry fer that."

"Still," Brazer added, thoughtfully, "if Slade don't bear of Jake's injury, he may go ahead with the men still left him."

"We'll lay fer Cyrenus, anyhow, an' ef he tries any mean tricks we will set down on him like a rhinoceros on a terbarker worm. I've got biz, now, an' I'll leave yer."

Dick left, and went straight to Aleck Goodwind's house. He found that person with his head still bandaged, but so far advanced on the road to recovery that he was hardly to be regarded as an invalid. The visitor had come on business, and he soon plunged into it in his straightforward way.

"Aleck," he began, "where is Margaret Aldridge now?"

Goodwind started nervously, and then, after a pause, slowly returned:

"What do you know of such a person?"

"Oh! I know enough to make things lively, an' the best you kin do is ter waller on yer kneecaps an' own up."

"You talk absurdly, boy!"

"Would the perleece say so?"

"Do you threaten me, sir?"

"Aleck, I don't think you're the worst gent in the gelorious city o' New York, but the time has come when you must own up or git caught in the landslide. S-e? Cy Slade is aimin' ter nip ye, an' he will do ef you don't git in out o' the wet ahead o' him. Mebbe you don't know nothin' 'erbout that thar picture?"

The Night-Watcher pointed to the portrait he had taken to be the water-waif's and his manner was aggressive, but Goodwind remained calm.

"I confess that it is Margaret Aldridge's likeness," he answered.

Richard's eyes opened widely.

"Whose?"

"Margaret Aldridge's."

"But I thought she was middle-aged."

"She is, now, but the portrait was made twenty years ago; at least, the original was. Said original was a painting; this crayon is a copy."

Dick looked at the picture wonderingly. He believed the speaker, but even this revelation did not serve to make it look unlike the water-waif. On the contrary, it was like her in every way. Recovering his wits, the investigator pointed to the portrait and continued:

"An' she married Gurdon Maclay, did she?"

"She was supposed to."

"Supposed?"

"I am told the marriage was not legal."

"I don't believe that."

"Can you give contrary evidence?" Goodwind asked, eagerly.

"No; I allow I can't. Wish I could."

"So do I," Goodwind thoughtfully returned.

"Aleck, s'pose you tell me all you kin about this case."

"I have no objection. The case is assuming such phases I must change my plans. You shall hear all I know."

CHAPTER XIV.

A VAILED WOMAN TO THE FRONT.

GOODWIND began with a determined air:

"Gurdon Maclay married Margaret Aldridge, or thought he did. He was under the thumb of an imperious father, and the marriage was not only kept secret, but, to leave no trace, was performed in such a way that, it is claimed, it was not legal.

"In course of time, Maclay and his wife had trouble—I don't know over what—and separated. In time Maclay's father died, but the younger man did not announce the marriage, nor did Margaret put in her claim.

"Years passed; then Gurdon Maclay, himself, died. It was supposed he was a bachelor. His money went to relatives. He, however, had large business interests, not yet brought to the point of consummation. In this line Slade and I had been his agents. We were both in the same business, and, naturally, rivals.

"When he died, we both claimed control of certain interests on the strength of papers he had given us. Really, neither of us was sure of his position, and we dared not invoke the law to decide our rights. The executor of Maclay's interests remained in nominal charge, while Slade and I really did the business, and continued to pocket rich fees.

"Of late I have been suspicious that Slade meditated some bold move to get me out of his way, and I was not at a loss to determine the source of the attack when, on the night I first met you, I was waylaid by roughs. The paper of which I was then robbed was one I had obtained by chance, and which would have proved Slade guilty of defrauding Maclay.

"Of course he had learned of my movements, and he hired his ruffians to get the paper. They succeeded, and I am powerless to down my rival."

Goodwind ended. Dick Brazer cared but little for the selfish quarrels of the rival agents, and he did not press the point, but quickly asked:

"What about Maclay's wife?"

"I don't even know where she is."

"And her child—hers an' Maclay's?"

"Was there a child?"

"Why, cert."

"I believe I dimly recollect that they had a child, but if my information is correct, it died."

"Sure?"

"No; I am not sure. I only tell you what I vaguely remember, and I may be wrong. Was there a child who lived?"

The last question was eagerly asked, for it occurred to Aleck that if Maclay had a living child it would be well to look up the evidence of that disputed marriage. If legal, it might be possible to injure Slade by bringing forward the heir.

"I don't know ez there is," Dick answered, "but I've heerd there was a child, an' I hoped it was alive, now."

"I only wish we could prove it."

Goodwind walked about the room in a nervous way, and Dick saw that he would make a good ally if needed. The man had unbosomed himself with an appearance of great frankness, and the listener believed he was sincere. The latter read between the lines and saw that Aleck, like Slade, was an unscrupulous sharper, but he believed the former's connection with the case ended there.

After some further conversation the Night-Watcher took his departure.

He had gone two blocks when he was brought to a stop by sight of a familiar face. A cab had stopped by the curbstone and a man alighted. It was Bat Magoun, and his face bore a sullen, ugly expression, even for his ugly face.

Dick did not care particularly to be seen, and he stopped by the window of a small store, and pretended to be busy there. Really, he kept close watch elsewhere, and was rewarded by seeing a tall, finely-formed, but closely-veiled woman alight from the same vehicle.

Bat moved toward the nearest house, but the lady paused and looked in doubt.

It was not a prepossessing building, and she evidently hesitated to enter. She cast a glance up the street, and, seeing Dick, spoke in a rather imperious tone:

"Come here, boy!"

Richard hesitated, and then went obediently.

"I will give you one dollar to keep me company while I am in that house. There will be nothing for you to say, or do."

The Night-Watcher glanced at Magoun, but that person, who would have objected to any other boy, had nothing to say. If Dick was as trustworthy as he thought, it would be all right; if not, he was hopelessly in Dick's power already.

The latter analyzed the situation quickly.

"All right, mum," he returned. "I ain't got my dress suit here, but mebbe it won't make no dif. W'en I call on the 'swagger set,' on Fifth Avenue, I allays hev a b'iled shirt, c aw-hammer coat, cane, eye-glass, dog, an' a sickly expression o' face, but no 'swagger' lives here, b'jinks!"

The veiled woman made an impatient gesture,

and Magoun unlocked and opened the door. She followed him in, and close after her came Dick.

"Remember," she cautioned, "I am to look from garret to sub-cellar."

"You shall."

"And," she added, firmly, "if I am molested I shall defend myself. I have this boy, too, as a safeguard."

"Don't you git yer antic on!" growled Bat. "You are jest ez safe ez in yer own parlor."

Richard took this statement with a grain of allowance, and it is probable that the veiled woman did, likewise. She bade the boy keep close to her, and the search was begun. She had no cause to complain that she was restricted in her movements; Bat was easy, airy and insolent, but he revealed every nook and corner of the house.

At last the search was completed.

"You kin see I told the truth," he remarked, with a self-satisfied air.

"You have tricked me again."

"No; but you hev been wrong."

"It is false! I know you have had the girl in your possession."

Bat cast an anxious glance toward Richard, and then returned:

"Mum, you are 'way off."

"I say you had her imprisoned here. You have spirited her away, but you still know where she is. Tell me her whereabouts, or take the consequences!"

The veiled woman had lost the steady calmness which before marked her manner, and spoke with quick and nervous emphasis.

"I don't know—"

"It is false! Tell me the truth, or I will shoot you in your tracks!"

Out came her revolver, and Bat found himself fairly covered. The hand which held the weapon trembled a good deal, but her vehemence showed how much in earnest she was. Magoun looked alarmed. Both he and Aleck realized that in her nervous mood she was liable to press the trigger by accident at any moment and send a bullet through his villainous body.

The Night-Watcher was as much interested as any one else, and he was of the opinion that he desired a private talk with this woman—it was not prudent to speak freely there.

He had recognized her voice as the same woman who had interviewed Bat in the latter's home the night when "Tom" caught him listening to the couple, and would have dealt so severely with him but for Bat.

Furthermore, her questions regarding some girl whom Bat had spirited away were of deep interest. But he would take no part in the conversation, then.

Magoun backed away from the revolver.

"Say, put that gun up, please," he requested, anxiously. "Et might go off."

"It will! I tell you I will shoot if you don't tell me where she is."

"I swear ter you I don't know—"

"Your oath is worthless."

"Tell yer w'ot I'll do: I'll join ye an' make the best kind of a hunt fer her—"

The owner of the revolver brought her foot down angrily on the floor.

"Speak the truth, or I'll fire!" she cried.

"Then, by the fiends! I'll die fightin'!" Bat cried.

He sprang toward her like a tiger.

CHAPTER XV.

STRANGELY WARNED.

THE veiled woman pressed the trigger.

A report followed, and a bullet sped on its way.

Bat Magoun sprawled on the floor.

For a moment Dick thought that the fellow had received his last injury, but, really, his fall had saved his life. In his headlong rush he had failed to get good footing, and had tripped over a floor-rug. He went down none too soon; the leaden messenger just missed him.

The veiled woman had grown excited, and she did not pause then. She recoiled the weapon and fired again, and only her nervousness saved the rough.

By that time he was a badly-frightened man, but he realized that his only hope lay in activity, and, having regained his feet, he made another headlong dive toward her.

He was just in time to seize the revolver.

"Now, I have you!" he shouted.

He wrested the weapon away.

"You tiger-cat!" he hissed; "I'll serve you as you would 'a' served me!"

He aimed the revolver, but Richard caught his arm and exclaimed:

"Hold yer hosses, general! We don't want no exsamination here, b'jinks! Le's taper off, an'

let dogs an, cats delight ter scratch an' slug. I don't want ter be a witness ag'inst you in court."

It was a very quiet hint, but it reminded Bat that he was not sure that he could trust Richard fully. He grew duly prudent, and tossed the revolver aside.

"All right," he agreed, "but, by sin! I ain't goin' ter be shot full o' holes ter please nobody. Out o' the shebang yer go, woman, an' ef you see fit ter kick up a row, you kin!"

He seized her by the shoulders and started her rapidly toward the door. She resisted, but in vain, and the exit was soon reached. He shoved her out on the stoop roughly and locked the door behind her.

"There, tiger-cat! you're fixed!" he commented. "Ef she wants ter make a kick an' call the perleece, why, let her. I'm all right!"

"Who is she, Mr. Magoun?" quietly asked Dick.

"A crazy woman; no more, or less. Aba! she is goin' ter take her old hearse an' amble off. Good!"

The glass by the side of the door enabled both Bat and Dick to watch, and the latter was as depressed as Magoun was jubilant when he saw that the woman had, indeed, given up the attempt and was entering the cab. She was going away, and the coveted chance of addressing her was not vouchsafed him, for he had no way of getting out.

The woman sat down in the cab and threw back her veil. Her face was exposed. Dick saw it and started.

She was of middle age, but, despite this fact, he was startled by her resemblance to the portrait in Aleck Goodwind's room, and—to the water-waif. It was as if he saw the latter with twenty years suddenly added to her age.

A moment later the cab was in motion, and the lady was whirled rapidly away—whither, Dick had no means of knowing. He would have given much to see and talk with her, but the chance was lost.

Bat Magoun was to blame for all this, and the Night-Watcher could hardly avoid showing his disappointment and anger as Bat breathed:

"Wal, I'm red o' her!"

"Reg'lar Tartar, wasn't she?" Dick returned, with an effort.

"Yes."

"Wot's her name, an' whar does she live?"

"I don't know either thing. She's been annoyin' me serious, but et's a case o' mistaken identity. I ain't the man she thinks. See!"

"Who is it she wants, anyhow?"

"A five-year old gal, an' I don't know any sech."

Dick was not satisfied to let the matter drop, and he asked other vain questions. He made them as careful as possible, but Magoun avoided every pitfall for his feet, and finally grew suspicious.

"Don't be so blamed inquisitive!" he growled. "I won't answer, fer—fer I can't. I don't know. See? I ain't the man she takes me fer, an' I don't know a blessed thing about it all. She's been harassin' me without cause, she has, an' I feel hurt!"

Dick knew just how deep this grief was, but had to let matters rest just as they were. There seemed nothing to be gained by lingering in such company, so the Night-Watcher beat as graceful a retreat as possible, and had soon left the house behind. He again sought his uncle and told the story.

"Ef we knew where the woman is," he added, "I guess we could git on ter the puzzle in about two shakes of a jack-rabbit's leg. She's got one end o' the chain, an' we the other. Now, I've got ter find her ef et takes me from April Fool Day ter next St. Valentine's."

Night was fast approaching, and they went over to Richard's home to prepare for the possible attack from Slade's tools.

Dick first interviewed the water-waif, and found her ill and suffering.

"My head is giving me great distress," she explained. "I am not only confused and uncertain, but sharp pains shoot through my head. I fear I am going to be very ill."

"Mebbe your memory is comin' back," the boy suggested.

"I have lost hope of that."

"Oh! ef you don't git a new grip soon we'll hev in a doctor, an' he kin cure ye right off, quick. Don't git down-hearted. I'll stand by ye, b'jinks!"

With this genuine sympathy he tried to cheer her up, and he also tested her memory with the new names he had heard, but none of them found responsive echo in her darkened mind.

Richard's wide acquaintance along the water-

front enabled him to select aids for the possible adventure of the night in a discriminating way. He decided upon two muscular 'longshoremen, and they were ready and anxious for the adventure. At an early hour he introduced them to the house as secretly as possible, and the defense were ready for action.

All that now worried them was the fear that Slade, being minus Jake's services, would not make the attack.

At ten o'clock the door-bell unexpectedly rung. Dick looked out before answering, but, seeing it was only a young woman, opened the door. She stepped in quickly, uninvited.

"I want to see you," she announced.

"All right, mum," he returned. "Step inter this room, an' we'll loosen up our jaws."

The hall was dark, but there was ample light in the parlor. They entered, and then, as she faced him, he saw her face plainly for the first time. As he did so he started in surprise.

She so closely resembled the water-waif that it seemed as if she must be that girl, herself. The likeness was remarkable.

"I have come to warn you!" she began, hastily.

"Warn us? About wot?"

"You are going to be attacked!"

"Oh! are we? Who by?"

"That I cannot tell, but it is a fact that this house will be attacked before morning by a gang of roughs. Their purpose is to abduct a lady who is here—a young girl."

Richard was not surprised. Now that his first shock was over he remembered the girl he had seen at Slade's house when he went there on Goodwind's errand. Even then he had noticed her striking resemblance to the water-waif, and he knew his visitor was the same person.

"What is this ter be done fer?" he asked.

"I cannot tell you," she responded.

"How did you hear of it?"

"You must excuse me from answering."

Dick saw she did not intend to reveal the facts, and he bluntly asked:

"Hev you gone back on Slade?"

She was silent for a moment, and evidently disconcerted, but finally made answer:

"Your question is vague."

"Not a bit," was his cheerful declaration. "I know you hev been at Slade's, an' I kin guess some more, but not all. You show your good sense by comin' over ter the side o' law an' the right, but some more light will be welcome. S'pose you make a clean breast of it, an' elocidate the whole mystery. Eh?"

"Be satisfied with what you already have," she returned, showing vexation and uneasiness. "You ought to be thankful enough for the warning not to press me for what I cannot tell."

"I ain't ungrateful, b'jinks! an' I thank you a heap, but you've told jest enough ter rouse my curiosity. I see you at Slade's with my own eyes, an' the fact sort o' gives rise ter some interogations. Be you related ter Slade? Ef not, why wuz you there? An' why be you now givin' of him away? Them is the p'int."

"I do not admit anything that you allege," the girl answered, coldly. "You have the warning, which is all I can tell, and it remains for you to neglect or heed it."

"Oh! We'll heed it; never you fear; an' I thank you kind an' hearty, miss. You'll stay with us ter-night, won't yer?"

He expected a refusal, and was not a little surprised when she agreed very promptly. After some further talk he left her in the parlor and went to find his uncle.

"Jeho-gosh! how much she looks like my water-waif!" he muttered. "The mystery is gettin' deeper than Jersey mud, an' I don't know head from tail. Say, wot ef she ain't on the square? Wot ef this is a scheme o' Slade's ter work an enemy inter our camp?"

He stopped short as this thought came to him, meditated, and then went on his way.

"Anyhow," he added, "we hev got a pretty solid garrison here, an' when Slade comes with his gang we'll be ready. Et will be a mighty hot time!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FORCED ENTRANCE, AND AFTER.

WHERE Nicholas Brazer heard of the new arrival, and of her peculiar position, he was even more suspicious than his nephew. It was singular that any one from Slade's should come to warn them. Of course there was a chance that the latter's best friend would turn against him, but if such was the case, now, why did the new-comer refuse to answer questions?

"And her resemblance to your water waif," Nicholas added, thoughtfully. "That is very odd. I don't see through it."

"We are goin' to, later on!" Night-Watch Dick asserted, with emphasis. "We'll know all about this, or swaller our collar-button in tryin'."

"Then keep an eye on your visitor. I have an idea that if she means us well she would be a good deal more free with her tongue if Slade was in prison. If she is a traitor to us, then she certainly needs watching."

"We will eye her like a cat!"

The resolution was kept. They could do no more to prepare for the attack, but the unknown girl was kept constantly under watch. If she was aware of this fact she gave no sign to that effect, but sat in the rear room to which all had gone, to avoid showing a light, and waited with calmness greater than that shown by any one else.

Midnight arrived and brought no change in the situation. It was the same at one o'clock. Dick and one of the 'longshoremen were continually on watch, but, outside, only the usual scenes of night came under their observation.

Half-past one!

Dick saw a man walk down the street. His manner was quiet, and nothing showed that he had unusual business on hand. He passed the house; then turned, retraced his steps and disappeared.

A very brief pause followed, and then he came into sight again, this time accompanied by two other men. They drew near, and one word passed Richard's lips:

"Slade!"

Then he turned to the 'longshoreman.

"Put the garrison on; fun begins!"

The man addressed obeyed without question. The defenders became on the alert, and all waited to see where the attack would be.

Slade and his followers allowed the patrolman of the beat to pass. Then they came quickly to the side door. One of them introduced some kind of a burglarious instrument into the key-hole, and a soft clicking followed. The lock did not at once respond, but he was evidently an adept at the business. He persevered, and finally took hold of the knob. The door yielded to his touch; it opened.

They paused and listened.

"All's clear!" whispered one.

"Be very careful," Slade urged, "and don't do harm to any one if you can help it."

"You want ter win, don't yer?"

"Of course, and if any one molests us, they must take the consequences."

Low as this conversation was, it reached Dick Brazer's hearing. He retreated softly, and gave them chance to enter fully.

One of the party evidently had been there before, for he passed along the dark way without hesitation or mishap. They entered the room where were the defenders, crouched in ambush. Nicholas Brazer stood by the gas-fixture, ready to turn on the light when he thought best.

"Get up-stairs at once," Slade urged. "We want to get the girl, and have this over with. I don't like this darkness."

Brazer turned his hand quickly. The tiny point of flame which he had been hiding flashed into a broad blaze; the room was suddenly lighted brilliantly.

The housebreakers found themselves covered by a group of revolvers, with grim and determined men back of them.

"Hands up!" cried Night-Watch Dick, commandingly.

The intruders stood aghast. Explanations were not necessary; the dullest of the trio could see they were in a trap.

"Be still!" Nicholas ordered. "Attempt to use your weapons and we will shoot you in your tracks!"

One of the trio, whom Dick recognized as "Tom," the friend of Jake, flung down the long knife he had held.

"I ain't no fool," he asserted. "I cave!"

Slade stood speechless with dismay, but the third man, the cracksman, turned and made a rush for the door. He did not reach it; one of the 'longshoremen knocked him down, and then sat upon his chest.

"Mister Cyrenus Slade, Esquire, your game won't work," remarked Dick, coolly.

"You miserable spy!" the baffled villain hissed, "I only wish I could get at you!"

"Keep yer mind on yer own biz, Cyrenus; my affairs are all right an' bloomin'. Wot do yer want here, anyhow?"

Slade was about to reply, but second thought caused him to close his lips. From that moment all of the intruders were silent, and nothing could be extracted from them. Dick had borrowed a quantity of old handcuffs, and these were duly placed upon the prisoners, rendering them helpless.

After a vain attempt to make Slade talk, Dick went to the unknown girl.

"We hev the gang in quod," he remarked.

"I know it," she answered, quietly.

"Don't you think et would be a good notion fer you ter tell all you know?"

"Why?"

"Because you'll be called ez a witness ag'inst them, an' the questionin' there might not be so friendly as mine."

"Your explanation implies a threat, but it does not influence me. There is no especial reason why I should not speak freely, now Cyrenus Slade has fallen. You shall hear my story."

"My name is Dora Evans, and I have always lived in poverty. A short time ago Slade came to me and made a proposal by which he offered to divide a fortune equally with me, if I would aid him to get it."

"This was his plan:

"A man named Gurdon Maclay, long dead, had left a large estate, and moneyed interests. I was to claim to be his daughter, and my resemblance to Mrs. Maclay—the resemblance was purely accidental—was so strong that he declared it could be done."

"I was poor, and I yielded so far that I went to his house, to undergo a regular system of study to fit me for the false claim."

"He had told me the real daughter was dead, and my conscience was easy enough until, yesterday, I overheard a conversation which showed me that Maclay's daughter was living; that she was in this house, and he was going to abduct her, to get her out of the way."

"My sense of right may be dwarfed, but that was more than I could endure. I determined to come here and warn you. You know the rest."

"Dora, you are a trump! Much obliged fer yer information. So Maclay's daughter is here?"

"Slade said so."

"No doubt he knows. W'ot he don't know of measly tricks, an' honist folks he kin prey on, ain't worth lookin' after."

Dick subjected the girl to more questioning, but only succeeded in convincing himself that, while fully intending to use her as a means of gaining his end, Slade had been too prudent to betray any more of his plot than was necessary. Dora seemed to feel relieved now that it was over, and showed such interest in giving help that the Night-Watcher decided to trust her fully.

A room was given her for the night, and then, when the prisoners had been stowed away, the members of the garrison lay down to get what sleep they could.

Dick had acted upon the belief that there would be no further demonstration, for the prisoners were securely bound, and outside aid did not seem to be a thing they need fear or expect. Shrewd as he was, he did not prove far-sighted enough, for once.

Dora Evans was supposed to be at rest in her room, perhaps to be sleeping. Her intentions had been of the best when Dick left her, but she did not sleep.

She lay down for awhile, fully dressed, but sleep did not come to her as desired. She tossed restlessly on the bed for many minutes, but finally rose hastily.

"He is calling me!"

Uttering this singular exclamation she stood with clasped hands, looking at vacancy. She saw no person, and had heard no voice, but her declaration was of positive nature.

She now seemed to be in a state of mental pain, and, suddenly, she clasped her hands to her head.

"Shall I never be free from his power?" she added.

For some time she stood inactive; then she walked to the door. There she came to a halt, and the powers of good and evil struggled in her mind. The battle ended with a sigh, and she opened the door.

The hall, and, as far as she could see and hear, the whole house was dark and silent. Dark though it was she had learned enough of the place to be able to thread its passages blindly, and she went on, feeling her way and treading like one in a dream, yet with a definite object in view.

When she paused it was where she had seen the prisoners placed for the night. She hesitated by the door, pressing her hand over her fast-beating heart, and then turned the knob and entered.

The prisoners were still there, handcuffed, tied together by their ankles, and helpless; and by the dimly-burning light they and Dora saw each other.

Cyrenus Slade gazed at her in blank wonder. "Olive!" he muttered.

"Not Olive," Dora returned, "but her unfortunate double."

A bitter exclamation fell from Slade's lips. "At last I know to whom I owe my downfall!" he cried. "You are the evil one, the female Judas, the traitress. But for you all would be well with me. As it is—see these accursed things!"

He held up his manacled hands, and shook them fiercely at her.

"Betrayed!" he added, "and by the woman I would have made rich with gold!"

"The gold of crime," Dora murmured, like one soliloquizing.

"Gold that would have brought comfort and luxury; gold you did not despise until you saw a chance to betray me for richer payers. I have wondered how I was so signally defeated, but sight of your face makes all clear. And now you have come to taunt me with my downfall! Woman, exult if you can, but my curse will follow you!"

CHAPTER XVII.

TREACHERY.

SLADE had grown vehement. The self-control of years, and the habits of a nature always cold, did not prove sufficient, then, to check the fierce hatred aroused by the belief that Dora had betrayed him. He glared at her fiercely, and only his helpless condition saved her from attack.

"You do not know what you say," the girl made answer, in her apathetic way. "Who planned this case? Who tempted me? Who held out promises so alluring that, to escape a life of poverty, I sacrificed my sense of honor and consented to rob a sister-woman of her right? You!—you, always and wholly! From the first your hand has guided the plot, and I have been but the creature of your will. If I have struggled, what has it availed me? I am still a slave. Now, you have called me and I come. What is your will?"

He looked at her in a puzzled manner.

"I have called you?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"When? How?"

"By the power you hold over me."

Slade was more than ever mystified.

"What is that power?"

"I know not; the arts of a fiend, of a subtle something which I feel but cannot name."

"And I called you?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"Because I felt your power. I was drawn here irresistibly—I came!"

Had Cyrenus Slade been of a coarser organization, he might have met this statement with scornful unbelief, but he was experienced and shrewd. Of any such secret power he knew nothing, practically, but he had heard of hypnotic influence. He never had taken the trouble to inquire if its claims were grounded on anything tangible, but an idea came to him now.

If there was such a thing, was it not possible that the power was his, and that he had exercised it unconsciously?

In his captivity he had wished for help, and that some friend was there. He had thought of Dora. Had he, indeed, drawn her to his side?

He was cunning enough to seize at the chance.

"Yes, I called you," he agreed.

"I know it but too well!"

"And now?"

"Now? It is you who are the master."

The arch-plotter's eyes twinkled.

"We want to escape."

She sighed like one weary to an extreme.

"What can I do?"

He glanced at the irons on his wrists.

"These accursed things must come off."

"How can I do it?"

"You can, at least, cut the ropes which bind our ankles. This will give freedom to our legs, and we can get out of the house. But the handcuffs will remain, a thing which a policeman may chance to see as we travel the streets. This would mean ruin. Again, if we flee precipitately, we must give up all here."

Slade spoke musingly, and the old desire for victory returned. Dick Brazer and his friends had settled down to rest. Was there not a chance to beat them, after all; then seize the water-waif and make their escape?

Dora turned her head away. She knew Slade was a villain, and her wish to see him beaten was as strong as when she talked with Dick, but either she was subject to the man's will, or she imagined she was.

He looked at her keenly.

After a pause he spoke commandingly:

"Cut our bonds!"

"I have no knife."

"You will find one in my pocket; a small knife, but fit for the purpose. Get it!"

She hesitated for a moment, and then obeyed. She obtained the article named, and a little labor sufficed to sever the ropes on their ankles. The handcuffs remained, and were not so easily disposed of, but the leader's purpose did not waver. He determined to win or lose all.

"Where is Dick?" he asked.

"I don't know," Dora answered.

"He must be somewhere about the house, and I want you to look him up. When our handcuffs were locked, he put the keys in the left-hand pocket of his jacket. They are there now, of course. Go and get them!"

The girl turned pale.

"I dare not!" she exclaimed. "I shall be discovered!"

"Nonsense! A clever girl like you ought to be able to work such a scheme as that. The fellow is young, and young folks sleep heavily. I dare say you could roll him over half a dozen times and never wake him up; but you have only to thrust your hand into a loose-fitting garment and get the keys."

"I feel sure I shall be discovered. And then—"

She clasped her hands and trembled.

"Would you leave me to my fate?" Slade demanded, roughly.

"I would if I could!" she murmured.

"I command you to obey me!"

He fixed his gaze upon her, and, for the first time in his life, endeavored control another person by will power. To what degree he was successful, he did not have means of knowing; perhaps it was only the old influence working within her, but she drew a deep breath and faintly answered:

"I hear you."

"Will you go?"

"Yes."

"Go, then!"

She turned with a bewildered, mechanical air and left the room. The prisoners looked after her in a frame of mind which may be imagined.

"Cap," spoke Tom, suddenly, "call her back!"

"Why?"

"She'll betray us."

"I think—I hope not."

"Ef she wa'n't a traitor she wouldn't be here! She will go straight ter that infernal kid an' give the snap dead away. Then whar be we?"

"I hope for better things; I hope the power will hold its mysterious grip."

"Dang me ef I understand the rifle at all, fer I don't ketch on ter no secret power. There is some peculiar thing gnawin' at her mind, fer she went off like one dazed by a blow, but I don't reckon et will hold."

"If it don't we are gone up."

"Jest my notion, an' I advise that we skip while we kin, b'gosh!"

"And have a patrolman see our manacled hands and arrest us?"

"Would we be worse than now?"

"I want to be better off. Be patient, Tom, and let us hope for the best. Somehow, I have confidence in that girl. I hope it will be all right."

Despite his assertion of confidence Slade was very much lacking in ease, and he kept his gaze riveted on the door. Where was Dora? What was she doing? If she tried to carry out his orders would she succeed? Despite what he had said about the young being "sound sleepers" he was full of anxiety. He had seen enough of Dick Brazer to understand that he was shrewd and alert. Would it be possible to remove the keys from his pocket without awakening him? The schemer had cast his lot on a single and desperate chance, and he was more disturbed at that moment than when the irons were first locked on his wrists. Then, he had no hope; now, it was possible that he was throwing away all he had lately gained. He looked at the door and strained his eyes and ears to secure the first evidence for good or evil tidings.

In the meanwhile the girl had gone about the errand.

After some reflection she decided on where Dick was to be found; certain preparations she had seen made indicated that all of the outsiders intended to occupy one room.

Toward this place she went. Cautiously she opened the door.

The gas was burning dimly within. By its light she saw a row of human figures stretched out on blankets which had been spread on the floor. All were athletic save one, and she was

quick to recognize Dick and his 'longshoremen allies.

All were asleep.

The crisis was at hand!

Dora hesitated. It seemed to her that her heart beat with ten times its usual force, and that it must arouse the sleepers like the sound of a drum.

More than this, she did not want to betray her new acquaintances. She had come to them in good faith, and that power, real or imaginary, was driving her on to work against them. Her reason forbade her to yield. She struggled—she failed.

"I must do it!" she whispered, faintly.

She moved forward. Softly her feet fell, and hardly a betraying sound resulted. She drew near them, and still they slept on.

Dick lay upon his left side. His position was easy, and he was resting as only the young can. Relying upon the secure way in which the prisoners had been secured, and never dreaming of treachery, no shadow troubled his rest.

Dora saw that if the keys still remained where Slade said they had been put—in the youth's left hand pocket—hers would be no easy task, but she went about it without delay.

Investigation showed that the corner of the jacket did not lie smoothly under the sleeper, but had been pushed nearly clear of his person. She could insert a finger in the pocket, but not a hand.

The faint clinking of metal told that the keys were still there.

Holding her breath with fear she began to draw the jacket further away from him. It was a hazardous attempt, and one on which much depended.

Little by little she gained; the available space grew larger; she pushed her hand into the pocket; she touched the keys.

The way of treachery was growing easier.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE WATER-WAIF'S ROOM.

"It is mine!"

Dora whispered the word as she drew out the first key, and there was a peculiar mixture of relief and regret in the utterance. Then her hand was again introduced to the pocket, and its entire contents removed. She had all that was necessary to accomplish her purpose, and still Dick Brazer slept on.

She rose to her feet.

"May Heaven forgive me!" she prayed.

She was tempted for a moment to fling down the pieces of metal, to arouse the sleepers and tell all, but it seemed as if the voice of Cyrenus Slade was calling her, and she turned away. Softly she went to the door. She opened it; she reclosed it. She was in the hall, and no discovery had yet come. As carefully as ever she went back to where Slade and his companions awaited her. Great relief was expressed in their faces as she entered.

"The key?" exclaimed Cyrenus. "Have you got it?"

She held up the bits of brass.

"Good!" he cried. "Now then, be quick and unlock these accursed irons!"

"It is not yet too late to change your plans—"

"Change them! Well, I reckon not; they need no change. Here, girl! get to work!"

Again Dora yielded. She applied one of the keys to Slade's bound hands, and the result was soon known. He grew jubilant.

"It's done!" he cried. "Now give me the rest."

Free, himself, he gave immediate attention to his companions, and all were finally relieved of their irons. Tom insisted upon shaking hands all around, but grew serious when the leader said:

"Now for the girl."

"Hadn't we better sneak?" Thomas asked.

"No!" was the authoritative answer. "We have the way clear to get the girl."

"My appetite is fer a sneak," Tom frankly admitted.

"Pause, Cyrenus Slade, before you do this," Dora requested. "I feel for this girl. I do not know why I ever agreed to pass myself off for her. Even when in your house, being drilled for the part I was to play, my conscience smote me severely. Now, I see clearly what an evil deed it would be to usurp her rights. I beg of you, do not do this deed. Let her rest in peace—"

"You are talking rank nonsense, girl!" Slade declared. "I am managing this affair and want none of your help. Your presence in this house is yet to be explained, but I can wait until I get you under my own roof. In the mean while, hold your tongue! Now, you are to fol-

low at our heels, and if you make a sound, or in any other way betray us, it will be a sorry job for you. Do you comprehend?"

"Yes."

She spoke faintly, and no other word of consent or complaint passed her lips. Slade looked at her keenly and decided that all was safe. She was, indeed, a plastic tool.

Further questioning showed that she knew just where her double, the water-waif, was confined, and she was ordered to lead the way.

Cyrenus decided that a lamp must be taken, and as one was at hand, it was lighted and taken along.

The march to the other room was very carefully made, for Slade knew he had only one man, besides himself, upon whom he could depend. Tom was a coward, and not to be considered in a fight.

At last they stood before the door. Beyond that frail obstacle was the victim. The leader turned the knob. The door was not locked.

Victory seemed to be at hand.

They entered.

Upon the bed lay the water-waif, fast asleep, and Slade's eyes glittered with satisfaction. He had planned to wrap her in the bed-covers and bear her to the side-door, where a carriage was to meet them. The delay might have caused the driver to leave, but he was near enough to be summoned easily.

"Wrap her up," he whispered, "and rely upon me to silence her if she awakens. Now, go on!"

"S'posen you wait a hair?"

The suggestion came in a quiet voice behind them, and the trio wheeled as one man. Down went their hopes at the sight then revealed. Before them stood a stout youth upon whose face was a grin of amusement and confident power.

It was Dick of the Docks!

"Gents," spoke the Night-Watcher, "et may put ye ter some inconvenience, but you've got ter cave or git all minced up fer hash. See the pint?"

He threw the door further back, and at his heels were to be seen his own force, Nicholas Brazer and the brawny 'longshoreman. Worse than all, for Slade, this force was well armed, each man having a revolver ready for use.

"I cave! I cave!" cried Tom, throwing up his hands.

"How about you, general?"

Dick put the question to Slade nonchalantly, but that man's face was a picture as he made reply:

"May the fiends seize you!"

"The fiends can't do et, this whack; we're goin' ter seize the fiends. See, general? Ef you don't, me an' these herculean 'longshore gents is jest pantin' ter knock you down, roll yer over on the floor, an' set on you in giner'al an' partic'lar. Is that plain? Will you give up the ghost?"

Slade was full of fight and courage, but he realized that it would be folly to fight armed men when his own party had empty hands. Sullenly he returned:

"I give up now, but my day will come."

"Sure! Every dog has his day. So does every crook—he has his day in Sing Sing!"

"Mock me while you can."

"Mister, w'ot I ought ter do ter you is ter smash the toe o' my shoe full o' dents on the flyin'-jib o' yer coat, b'gosh! Sech p'izon critters as you be don't deserve no decent usage. Still, I'm content ter git the bulge on yer. Feller-gobblers, handcuff an' tie them snakes ag'in!"

There was no resistance. The work was soon done, and the prisoners returned to their old quarters. One of the 'longshoremen agreed to stand guard over them, and no further fear was felt that they would get away.

Then Dick gave attention to the cause of all this trouble.

"Dora, I'm surprised at yer!" he declared.

"Heaven forgive me, for I cannot forgive myself!" she bitterly exclaimed.

"That's about the way I feel, too."

"You don't know all."

"I'd like ter."

"He charmed me, as the rattlesnake does its victim."

"Oh! did he?"

There was a world of unbelief in Dick's tone, but Dora proceeded to explain amid a shower of tears. Dick was not one to be obstinate in the face of good evidence, and his doubts gradually diminished. He had heard of hypnotism, and though he was not prepared to believe in it fully, he did not see any reason why he should be too severe.

Nicholas Brazer readily came out for Dora, and this decided Richard.

"All right, miss; we'll bury the hatchet, but ef I's you I wouldn't dig round nigh it, hereafter, fer fear it should pop up like Banquo's ghost. You kin stay here ter-night, and ter-morrow we will see—"

"No! I am going at once!"

"Where?"

"To friends I have in New Jersey. I will appear at Slade's trial if you wish, but, now, I want to get far away, where I shall not be tempted. Say not a word; I am going."

"Mebbe et's best so. I don't think you deserve much blame, though I guess you an' Slade would hev got my ward away ef I hadn't woke up jest after you stole my keys, missed 'em, an' got on yer trail. But let et pass!"

"I am going now. Pray for me, as I pray, myself, that I may be freed from Slade's secret hold. Farewell!"

And Dora went from their sight forever when she went out of the house. They did not call her back to appear in court at any trial, nor did she come. All they have learned of her was one brief line, a year later:

"Free from all influence, I am happy now!"

And they were glad to hear it.

Early in the morning Dick held a conference with his uncle, and, as a result, the house was left in charge of the others and uncle and nephew left the house. They hunted up a friendly policeman who was not then on duty, and all three went to a certain house. Up in a second-story room a man sat smoking and drinking. He had not heard any one admitted to the house, and it was a surprise when the door opened and persons unceremoniously entered.

He sprung up, and found himself facing Dick, Mr. Brazer and the policeman. He knew them all, and their coming impressed him as being so ominous that he dropped into his chair again.

"Mr. Bat Magoun," spoke Richard, quietly, "is yer orifice open fer biz?"

Not a word replied Bartholomew. The presence of the policeman indicated so much that he was upset.

"We called," pursued Dick, a twinkle in his eyes, "ter ask ef yer thought that coffin would sp'ile ef it wa'n't buried right. Also, we would like ter know w'ot you kin tell o' Cyrenus Slade an' his plot ag'inst the Maclay estate an' family."

Magoun found his breath.

"I don't know nothin' about any such affair!" he asserted, in a voice rendered sharp by alarm.

"Gammon! Bat, you are up a stump, an' yer only way is ter confess. Rats desert a sinkin' ship. You want ter do the same an' git under cover. We are dead onter you. Will you talk, an' save yerself, or go down with Slade's glass ship?"

Suddenly there was a loud knocking at the inner door.

"Let me out!" cried a female voice. "Help, help!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE STRUGGLE ENDS.

BAT MAGOUN sprung to his feet, a desperate gleam in his eyes, but the policeman drew a revolver.

"Sit down!" he ordered.

Magoun glared at his visitors; then, realizing how helpless he was, dropped sullenly into a chair.

The knocking and the voice had come from beyond a door directly back of him, and opposite that which led to the hall. Toward this door Dick quickly moved. He believed he recognized the voice, and was eager for the next act. He turned the key; a lady came out promptly; he beheld the "veiled woman" who had vainly visited Bat the day before.

She was excited, and she at once pointed to Magoun, and exclaimed:

"Gentlemen, I ask you to protect me from that wretch; to help me escape; to arrest him, if you have the power. He kidnapped me last night and brought me here. He is my enemy, and a desperate man; I know not what crimes he has committed!"

Richard touched her arm.

"M'm, w'ot might be yer name?" he asked.

"It is Margaret Aldridge."

"Not Mrs. Maclay?"

She turned quickly and met his gaze.

"What do you know of such a person?" she demanded, imperiously.

Magoun sprung to his feet.

"Say!" he cried, "ef you'll let up on me I

kin furnish proof that your marriage ter Gurdon Maclay was legal!"

She gave him a look of scorn.

"Spare yourself the trouble. I too have that proof at last. What I ask of you is to state where my daughter is."

"Don't ask him, mum!" cried Richard; "not until after you've seen a certain young woman we kin show yer. But we're awfully mixed on your case, b'jinks!"

"I can explain it in few words. I, Margaret Aldridge, married one Gurdon Maclay, but I had a cousin who bore the same name as myself, and she made trouble between me and my husband; how, it matters not. He and I separated, never to meet again. My cousin had concealed her evil work from me, and, after separation, she made me believe my marriage had not been legal. Through long years I believed this; long after my husband was dead; but the truth came to me at last.

"I had one child, a daughter named Olive. I had put her out with a family in New Jersey, but while I was away, five years ago, they moved, and I lost all trace of them and my child.

"Very lately I met this man, Magoun, and—how he knew of my affairs I know not—he agreed to produce my child for fifty dollars' reward; but he played me false, and did not keep his word."

Bat interrupted, eagerly:

"Don't blame me fer all, fer yer cousin, the other Margaret Aldridge, was the starter o' the plot. Three years ago she found out your marriage was legal—she said she had thought otherwise, before, an' I guess she told the truth—an' she set out ter git rich.

"Her scheme was ter hev' you thought dead, an' then she could git control o' your daughter, an' suck the money-sponge dry. She bought a gravestone which said you had died at that time, an' set it up over in Jersey, claiming et was your grave; but jest then she lost track o' your daughter, so she never tried, as she intended, to lure you away."

"And she—where is she now?"

"Dead!"

"Do you speak the truth?"

"Yes."

"How did she die?"

"Everybody was plottin' ter get a grip on the Maclay money. Slade and Goodwind were rival agents in managing it, and bitter enemies. Slade found a gal who looked ez you did when you was young, an' he has been waitin' ter put her forward as your daughter.

"But then he learned that the reel heiress wuz alive, an' he knew he must git her out o' the way. Yer cousin, t'other Marg'ret, was on the scene. He got her to join hands with him, by coaxin' an' by threats, an' Jake, Tom, me an' another feller was added.

"Margaret was the decoy, an' my pals I've jest named wuz the guards—I did not go—when the party set out ter go ter the prison fer the gal which Slade had selected; but the boat was upset by the pier, an' the gal was lost to us. The other Margaret was drowned."

"Have you proof of that?"

"Her body has floated ter Staten Island, an' you kin see et. That's good proof. Tom's brother found it."

"But my daughter?"

"Safe, mum," Dick put in.

"At last! Am I to see her after so many years?"

Mrs. Maclay's manner was so thankful that Dick regretted having used the word "safe," and he proceeded to explain the water-waif's mental condition, adding that a doctor probably would bring her around all right.

Then he turned upon Bat abruptly.

"Say, general, w'ot wuz yer idee o' buryin' an' empty coffin, or same as that, an' settin' up a moss-covered head-stone over it?"

"All Margaret Aldridge's idee," Magoun explained. "You see, when her scheme failed out in Jersey, as I told you, the stone was hid in the woods, there. Lately, when she decided ter try it ag'in, she thought the Cemetery of the Evergreens would be a better place for the bogus grave, an' that the old stone would answer jest as wal, if the burial could be secret.

"I did not know sure she was drowned until this mornin', an' when I hired you it was my notion ter carry on the game, share with her ef she showed up alive; an' ef she didn't, ter run the racket alone, an' see w'ot I could do. That's the whole story."

"An' a fine yarn it is!" cried the Night-Watcher. "Everybody was jumpin' on poor, dead Gurdon Maclay's property, but I notice the birds o' prey ain't made much by it. You've

run upon a snag, Bat; Slade an' Tom is pris'ners; the false cousin is dead an' Jake wounded. Kind of a losin' game, wa'n't it, general?"

Magoun sighed dismally.

"Even Aleck Goodwind, the cleanest o' the lot, got done up," added Richard. "He got proof that his rival, Slade, was defraudin' the estate, an' had the facts on paper, but Slade learned of it an' set men onter Aleck, an' they swiped him silly an' stole the paper."

Bat moved uneasily.

"Magoun has that paper, here!" declared Mrs. Maclay. "I saw it, not an hour ago."

The rough threw up his hands.

"Don't all jump on me at once!" he groaned. "Et was Tom an' some o' the gang who did the job, an' knocked Goodwin over. They brought the paper here, but I ain't responsible fer it."

"Gammon!" Richard returned. "You led that gang, Bartholomew."

"Anything else?" Bat asked, dismally.

"Nothin', except you an' the others will hev lots o' fun up ter Sing Sing. Now, Mrs. Maclay, le's hustle an' see yer daughter!"

At Dick's home!

After due discussion it was agreed that Mrs. Maclay should appear suddenly before the water-waif—otherwise Olive—and see if any good would result from it. Mother and daughter had been separated for six years, but nothing is stronger than the voice of Nature, and they had all heard of cases where lost memory had been regained abruptly by means of some such start.

Would it be so now?

They had taken a quiet look at Olive, and had found her sitting in her room, her brows knit in a frown as if she was trying to rend a thread of remembrance from the pall of oblivion.

Mrs. Maclay opened the door and entered.

Olive looked up.

The two gazed at each other.

The mother held out her hands.

"Olive—my daughter!" she murmured, brokenly, wistfully.

The water-waif rose. Her eyes grew startled; her face was pale. How much, and yet how little, that gaze expressed.

"Olive," Mrs. Maclay added, "don't you know your mother?"

A cry broke from the girl's lips; she clasped her hands to her head; she reeled, and would have fallen had not her mother caught her. Then she lay senseless in those loving arms.

The mother called for help, and Dick came in with one bound.

"W'ot shall it be—a doctor?" he demanded.

"Not yet! Bring water, camphor, a smelling-bottle—any reviving mixture!"

The Night-Watcher rushed out, and did the errand so well that he brought nearly a whole drug-store.

Mrs. Maclay had placed the fainting girl on the bed, and she now sent every one else out, asking them to remain within call, and answer quickly when summoned. They went, and a long period of anxious waiting followed. It was broken, not by a call for help, but by the appearance of Mrs. Maclay. Her eyes were tearful, and her lips quivered.

"I thank Heaven," she said, "that my daughter is restored to me—restored fully. Her mind is again clear; she remembers all. Her past is recovered!"

"Cricketty-jim!" Dick exclaimed; "that's news fer a cheerful cast o' countenance. Say, feller-citizens, we ain't fit in vain. Glory E Pluribus! I guess our side has won!"

The prediction proved correct, for the triumph was complete.

Mrs. Maclay presented her case in court and proved beyond question that she had been Maclay's legal wife. She received her rights, and she and her daughter are enjoying the use of the property. The "water-waif" fully recovered her mental and physical health.

Cyrenus Slade deservedly went to Sing Sing, and he had companions there in Magoun, Tom, Bob Blinks and Jake—the latter having recovered from his wound after a long illness.

Aleck Goodwind was not prosecuted.

Dick continued his career as aid to the police, and became a water front patrol whom crooks and night-hawks learned to dread as the very genius of danger for them.

THE END.

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